SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT

28 YEARS LATER: THE BONE TEMPLE

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MONSTERS · AL… …RES

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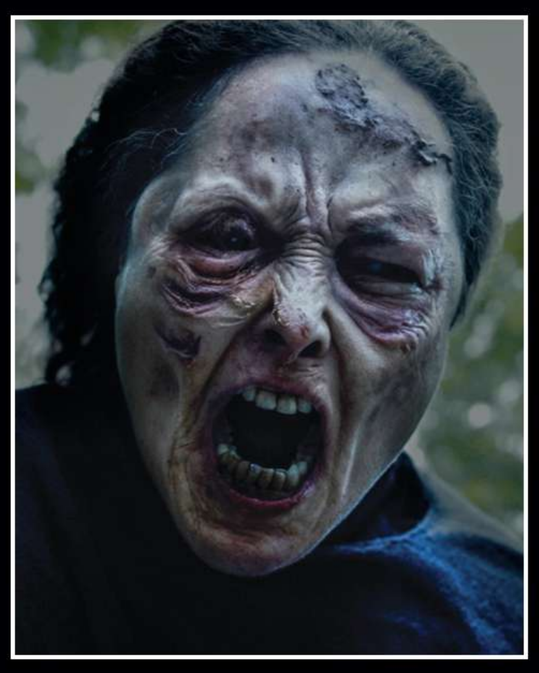
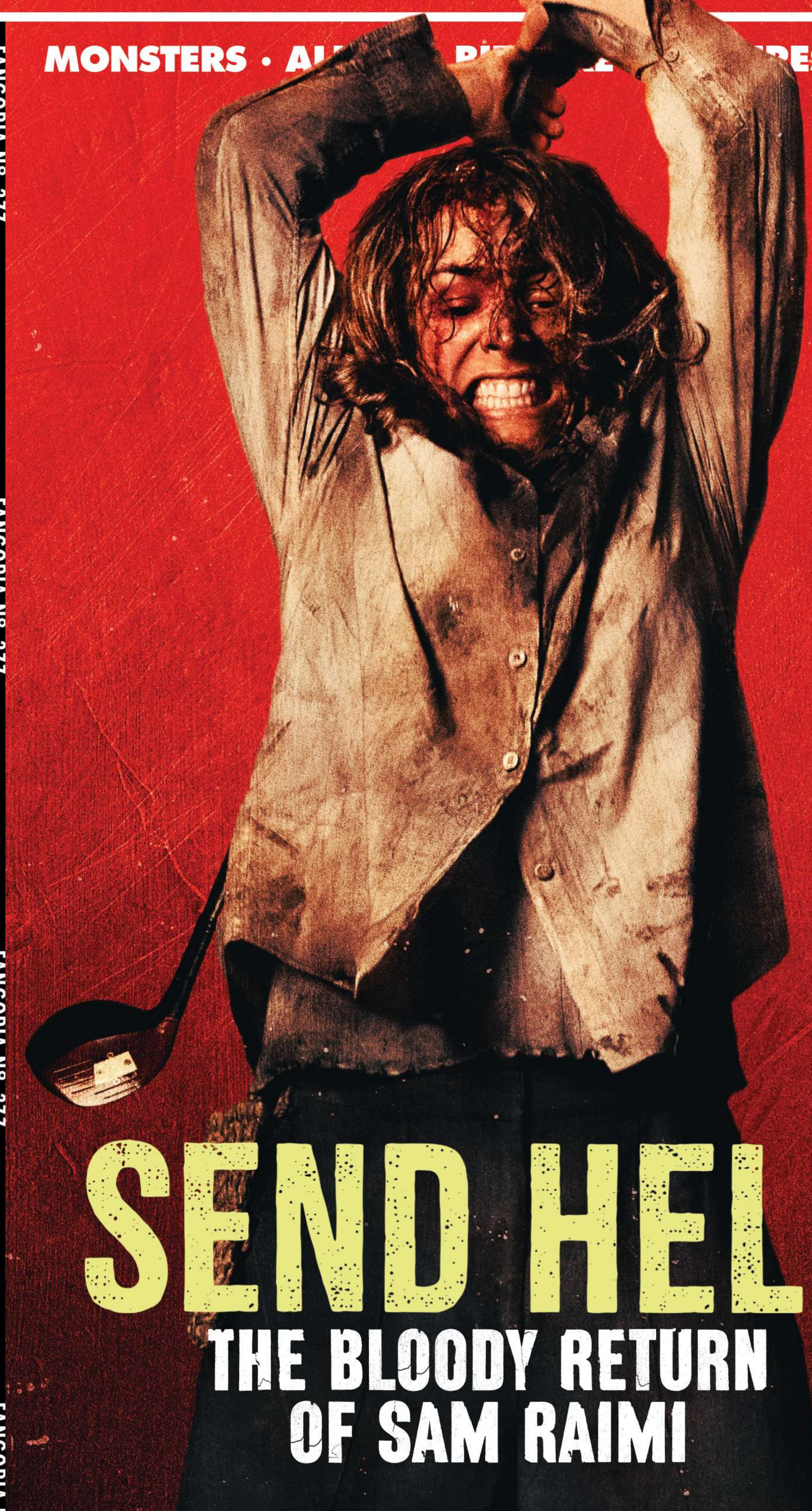
BRYAN FULLER'S HARE-RAISING *DUST BUNNY*



***MOTHER OF FLIES*, FACE OF NIGHTMARES**



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THE BLOODY RETURN OF SAM RAIMI

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WINTER 2026

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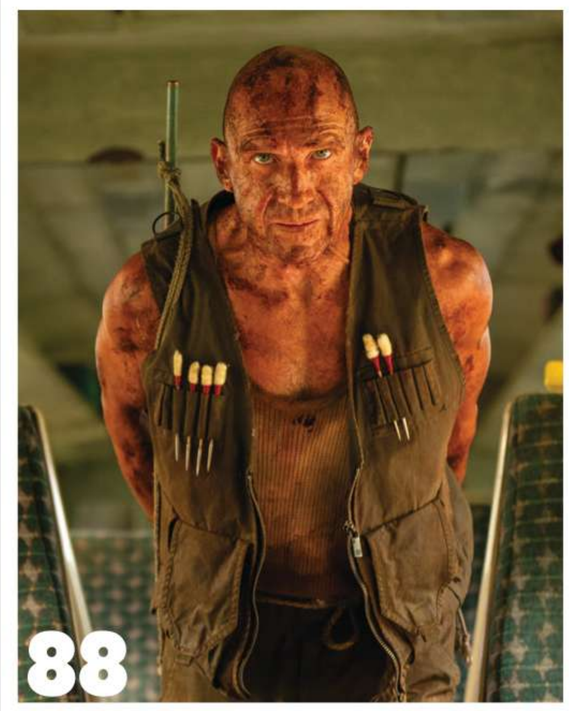

ON OUR COVER: (SUBSCRIBER VARIANT) *SEND HELP* COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS, BACK COVER PHOTO BY MIYA MIZUNO COURTESY SONY PICTURES // (NEWSTAND VARIANT) FRONT: *THE BRIDE!* COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES, BACK: *DUST BUNNY* COURTESY OF ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

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ALL UNCREDITED PHOTOS FROM FANGORIA VAULT

INVOCATION

Horror For All, Horror Forever

Welcome to 2026, my faithful flock of Fangorians! Ten years after it ceased publication, with this issue FANGORIA marks its 47th year of existence, its eighth anniversary of Volume 2, and its 30th issue under my tenure.

I'm certainly proud of that; there've been no shortage of, um, obstacles since my hiring in February of 2018, and the fact that we're still in print (and growing!) is a testament to both my employers' patience and the talents of my team (looking at you, Meredith Borders, Jason Kauzlarich and Jimmy Shaw), keeping this magazine both on time and on point.

But we mustn't succumb to self-aggrandizing. The plain fact is that Fango is thriving in 2026 because there's just so damn much horror to talk about. As a kid I never thought I'd see the day when horror was so popular, so accepted, and so friggin' *voluminous*. Every issue is a "kill your darlings" nightmare in which I have to leave a movie or two out of our mag. And we have ONE HUNDRED pages to fill, with usually 20 articles in each issue. We're truly spoiled for choice, and have been for a few years.

No signs of that changing in this issue: we've got Sam Raimi's return to the nasty side of cinema with his survival horror *Send Help*; we've got Bryan Fuller's creature feature directorial debut *Dust Bunny*; we've got Maggie Gyllenhaal's wildly original *The Bride!* (That exclamation point is the film's, and had us hoping the movie was a secret musical. Not the case, but good news: what she delivered is even more surprising and satisfying.)

In fact, there are FIFTEEN new releases covered in this issue, and they run the gamut from thoughtful, delicate period pieces to 16mm gorefests, from Big Studio Release to Something A Group of Pals Made in Their Hometown. Taken as one big mosaic, it's a picture of the horror landscape that should fill you with hope for the genre. Horror is not only *not* going anywhere, it's continuing to evolve, and growing in exciting new directions.

That's good news for all of us.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

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READ A BOOK, ALREADY

If *Sinners*, *Weapons*, *28 Years Later* and *Frankenstein* make the past 12 months seem like a banner year for horror cinema, you should see what it's done for the printed page. The present boom of horror prose — novels, story collections, and anthologies — is no doubt fueled by an atmosphere of political volatility and violence, and 2025 is proving to be the crest of a remarkable wave of scary, scary books.

From historical horror (Daniel Kraus' *Angel Down* and Virginia Feito's *Victorian Psycho*) to the modern weird (John Langan's *Lost in the Dark* and Nathan Ballingrud's *Cathedral of the Drowned*) to serrated celebrations of the slasher and found footage genres (Philip Fracassi's *The Autumn Springs Retirement Home Massacre* and Michael Wehunt's *The October Film Haunt*, respectively), it's an embarrassment of riches for readers to choose from.

This year, editors Christopher Golden and Brian Keene reacquainted us with Captain Trips in *The End of the World As We Know It: New Tales of Stephen King's The Stand*. And master anthologist Ellen Datlow delivered *Night and Day*, new stories by 18 of the best authors in the genre, including Clay McLeod Chapman, Rachel Harrison, Brian Evenson, Gemma Files, Eric LaRocca, Benjamin Percy and Josh Malerman.

Joe Hill is making waves with his 900-page epic *King Sorrow*, as is Keith Rosson's Vietnam-vet-meets-vampire novel *Coffin Moon*. And if you aren't aware of Stephen Graham Jones' magnum opus, *The Buffalo Hunter Hunter*, you will be when awards season rolls around this spring, because it's gonna clean up.

If you need help knowing where to start in horror fiction, come find me on BlueSky, Threads, or Instagram, @igreggreene. I'd love to point you in the "write" direction! - Greg Greene

Greg, if your goal was to shame me for not reading enough great horror novels this year, mission accomplished. I take some small solace in clocking how many of the above talents have appeared on our own masthead. I support authors, I swear! - PN

AND WATCH SOME TV, TOO

Have we ever been better served by TV, as a horror community? *It: Welcome to Derry* and *Alien: Earth* were two recent solid examples and I suspect we will get more of both.

We also have Mike Flanagan's many series, *Yellowjackets*, and *Revival* to name but a few. Enjoy this while it lasts! - Andy McGilvray

Indeed. And though these are drums we've banged before, don't sleep on The Creep Tapes, Interview with the Vampire, *and the ever-expanding horror entertainment empire that is The Boulet Brothers. - PN*

BLOODY BITES by Shane Tea French

"Sooooo… what's in the box?"

DO YOU HEAR THAT? EVY (NINA KIRI) INVESTIGATES *THE UNDERTONE*.

THE UNDERTONE WHISPERS BENEATH THE SURFACE

By Michael Gingold

LISTEN UP, BECAUSE IAN TUASON'S FEATURE FILM DEBUT HAS SOMETHING (SCARY!) TO SAY.

As the title makes evident, *The Undertone* is a movie in which you're scared as much – if not more – by what you hear as by what you see. Particularly when seen at its world premiere at this past summer's Fantasia International Film Festival, during which odd and scary noises emanated from all sides and the back of the auditorium. When A24 releases *The Undertone* (it's currently set for March 13), be sure to catch it in a theater with the best sound system possible.

The film's protagonist Evy (Nina Kiri) is also frightened by what she hears. She's a podcaster who records her show with her remote partner Justin (Kris Holden-Reid) in the house where she's taking care of her ailing mother (Michèle Duquet), who lies comatose in an upstairs bedroom. When an anonymous sender emails the duo a collection of mysterious recordings, Evy and Justin decide to make them the podcast's next subject, though their contents give Evy and the audience a serious case of the creeps. And the evil we hear might not be satisfied with being confined to the digital world…

The Undertone, which won Fantasia's Gold Audience Award, announces its first-time feature writer/director Ian Tuason as a major talent in the genre. Yet he's soft-spoken and humble when Fango speaks to him and Kiri the day after the screening, and he reveals that the film is partially autobiographical. "I was caregiving my parents, like Evy, and I was writing *The Undertone* during that time," he recalls, adding that he originally conceived the project as a podcast itself. "It would have been just what Evy and Justin

WRITER/DIRECTOR IAN TUASON CONFERS WITH KIRI ON SET.

PHOTOS COURTESY BLACK FAWN FILMS • PHOTO (RIGHT) BY DUSTIN RABIN

The Undertone, which won Fantasia's Gold Audience Award, announces its first-time feature writer/director Ian Tuason as a major talent in the genre.

were recording. So you'd hear the intro music, and then, 'This is *The Undertone*' and 'I've been e-mailed these ten audio files,' and you'd listen to them listening to those. Then when my mom and dad passed away, I had the other idea: 'What if the podcaster was caregiving?'"

Once he decided to apply this concept and turn *The Undertone* into a feature film, his screenplay ended up at 250 pages. "That was just for my DP Graham Beasley to understand my vision," he explains. "I was going to do it with just me, Graham, an actress, a gaffer – maybe five people in the house, shooting it all ourselves. So the reason the script was so long was because it was lots of camera direction, with pictures I took around the house of the frames I wanted to see, and sound description. It was full of lines like, 'There's a whisper in her left ear,' and 'We hear a body falling from above right, crossing the frame and landing bottom left.' The whole screenplay was like that."

Tuason originally planned to self-finance *The Undertone*, before Beasley passed the script on to producer Dan Slater, who was impressed and in turn sent it to the team at Black Fawn Films, who quickly came aboard. They had previously worked with Kiri on *Let Her Out* and *The Heretics*, and recommended her for Evy – with just a week and a half to go before production was to begin. She proved to be more than up to the task of carrying a movie in which she has the only onscreen speaking role.

"It went fine," Kiri remembers. "It was a combination of having such a small crew, and feeling like we were all connecting and working together to make something good, and hearing the tapes for the first time while on camera, so I was genuinely reacting to those. And then having another actor [Ryan Turner, who voices Evy's boyfriend Darren in the movie] upstairs in the house, reading the scenes with me over the phone as Justin. He was in the house the whole time while we were doing those podcast sequences, so I had someone to act with. I didn't feel alone for any of that, because he was nearby, and we could also run lines beforehand."

"And then in the scenes with Michèle," Kiri continues, "She wasn't speaking, but she was still a scene partner, so I never felt a lack of energy flowing between me and anyone I was doing a scene with. That's the hardest thing if you don't have something coming back to you, and I didn't feel any difficulty in generating the energy I needed for those scenes."

Even though the part of Mama on paper required Duquet to simply lie immobile in bed, both director and star found the actress brought a great deal more to it – even though Tuason admits he approached the casting of the role "really poorly, because I thought it didn't matter. But we got lucky, because once we were shooting, I realized how much Michèle brought to the character. She had also been caregiving for her mom, so when she was breathing,

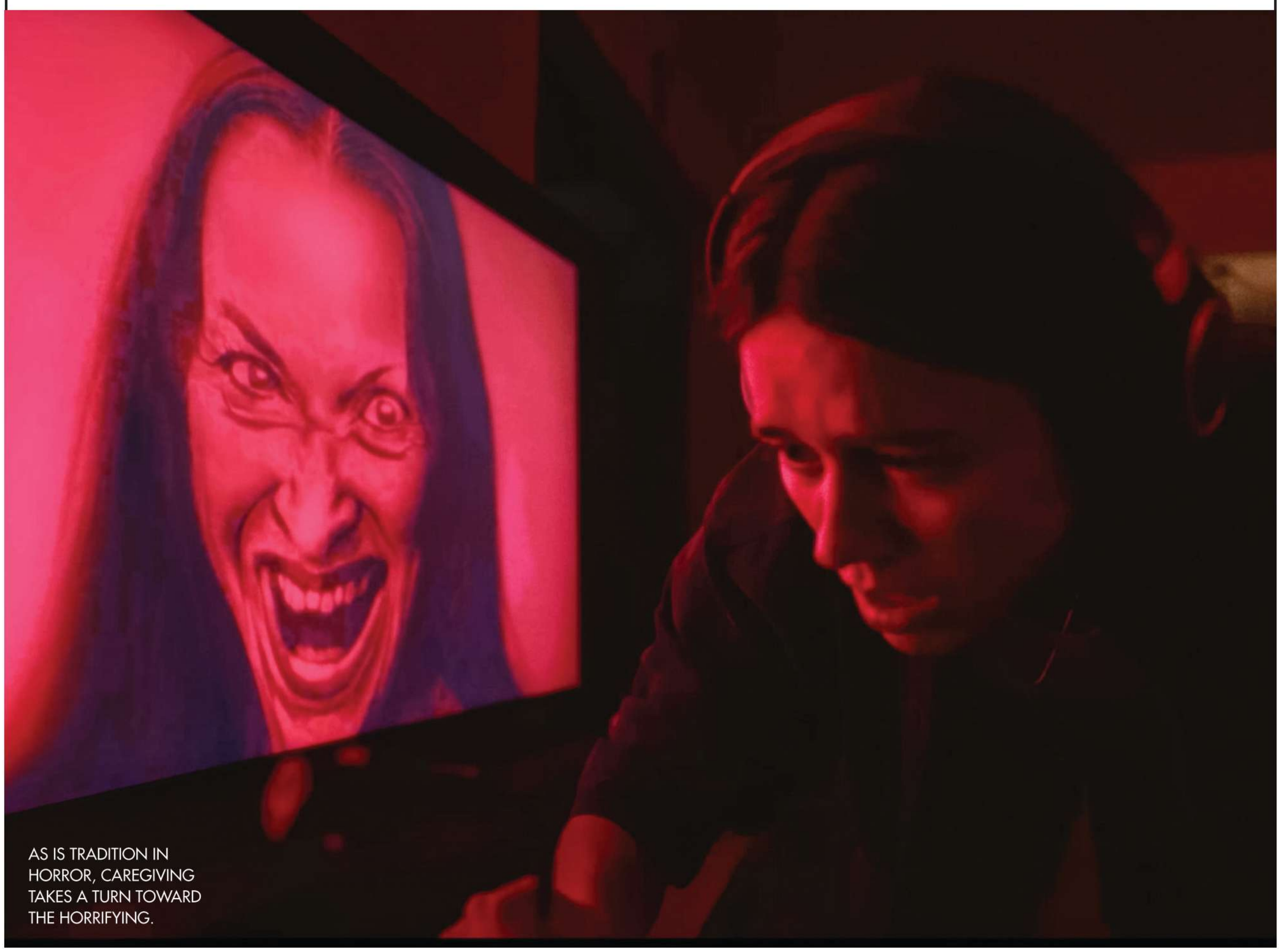
she was mimicking the breath of someone who's dying. And as the movie progresses, Mama's face starts drooping, and she consciously made her face do that. We all couldn't believe we didn't put that much importance on who we picked, until we met her. Someone else who didn't do what she did, who would have just laid there, the movie wouldn't be what it is."

"She was amazing," seconds Kiri. "It's really crazy how someone who just gives 150 percent elevates everything. Because I felt the same way: Someone who's going to be in bed the whole time, it doesn't really matter who it is. But she completely changed everything after she showed up on set. It was very impressive."

Two more key members of the *Undertone* cast are Keana Lyn Bastidas and Jeff Yung as Jessa and Mike, the couple heard on those audio files. As we and Evy hear it, their own audio project begins as an attempt to prove that Jessa has been talking in her sleep, and devolves into something far more disturbing. "Before the production, we went into my house and recorded all that on an iPhone," Tuason explains. "That's why it sounds so real. I blocked it in a way that implies it happened in that house. So when we hear Mike running down the stairs, we had Jeff run down those stairs holding the iPhone, and when we hear Jessa saying there's a baby in the sink, we did that in the kitchen."

Fango then asks about the creepy sounds of that baby crying on the files – and just then, a real baby starts wailing outside the interview room. "Would you believe that's happening to me all the time?" Tuason laughs. "We worked with a postproduction house called RedLab in Toronto, and they had an amazing library [of baby sounds]. So we used theirs."

In its tone and textures if not in its visual aesthetics, *The Undertone* feels akin to a found-footage movie, and Tuason says that one such film in particular was a major influence: "*Paranormal Activity*, because that movie is just a couple recording themselves while they sleep, and that's similar to what Mike and Jessa do. And *Paranormal Activity* was probably the last movie that scared me. The first movie that ever scared me was *The Exorcist*. So I kind of combined those two to make *The Undertone*."



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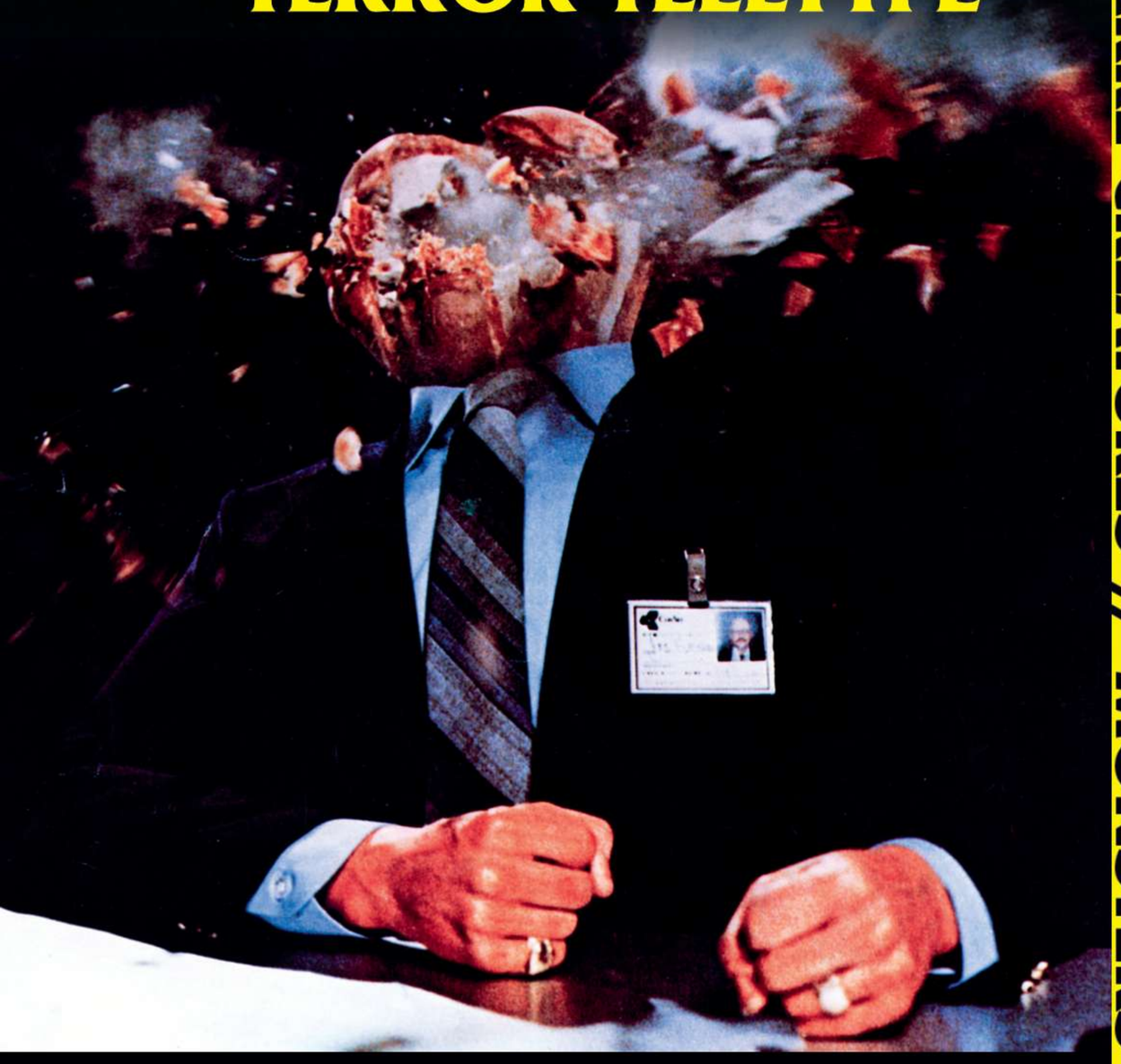

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ELEGIES

THE GOLDEN AGE OF MOVIE TIE-INS

WITH THE RELEASE OF A BRAND-NEW FANGO FRANKENSTEIN ONE-SHOT, A LOOK BACK AT THE MAG'S DIFFERENT MOVIE TIE-IN ISSUES OVER THE YEARS.

The recent announcement that FANGORIA was getting back in the movie tie-in business (beginning with a now-available *Frankenstein* "Bookazine," edited by the unstoppable Meredith Borders) brought back many fond memories.

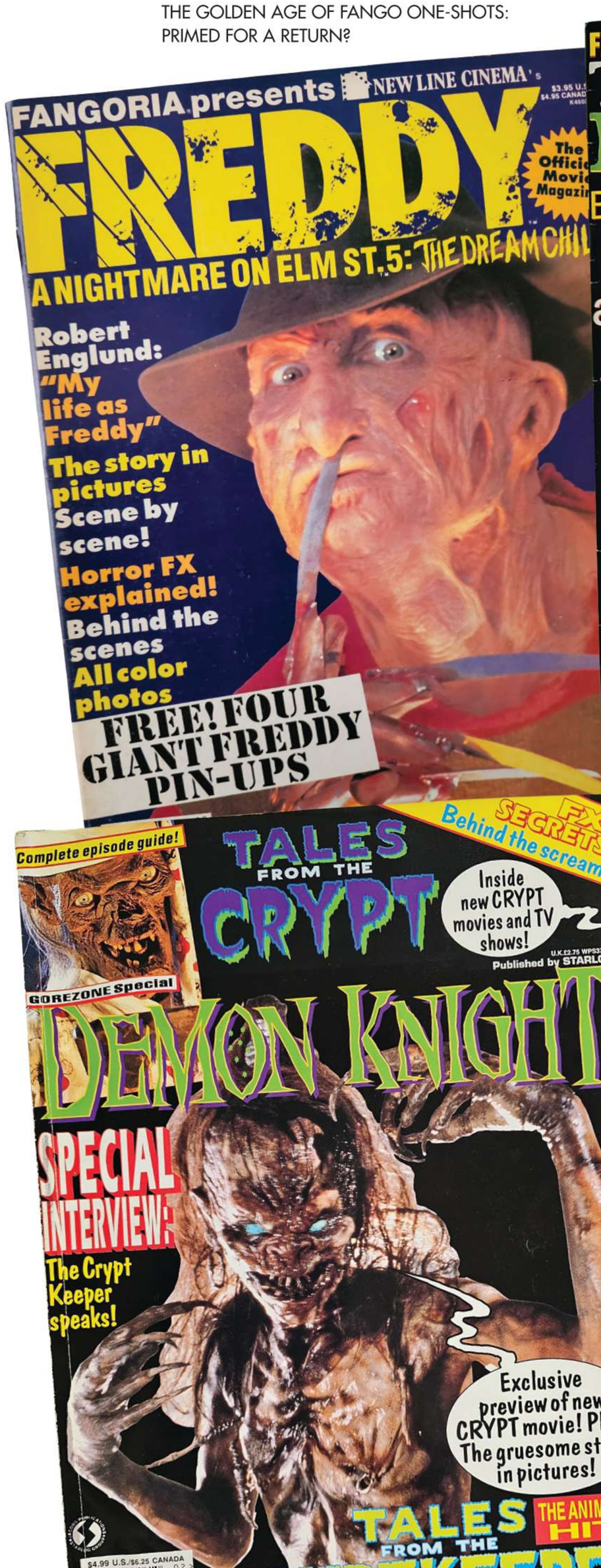
Back when I started at Fango in 1985 (God, I hate dating myself!), officially-licensed movie magazines were a staple of original parent company Starlog Communications. Starlog would pay a modest fee to a licensor (studio, copyright owner or production company) for the rights to publish a magazine based on an upcoming movie. The film outfits loved these, as the slick publications were an ideal promotional tool to tout their pictures, and Starlog loved them because if the film succeeded or was well promoted, it created instant customers for the tie-ins. Starlog dabbled with one-shots beginning with 1979's 007 opus *Moonraker*, but really didn't hit paydirt until 1985's *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. Legend has it that this poster mag was cobbled together from the movie's production notes over a weekend and designed in a day or two the following week. Once *Rambo* landed on newsstands and in bookstores, it was a huge smash (like the movie), the company's biggest seller ever. The spigot was open…

Starlog soon became the king of one-shots for three decades, churning out publications based on existing franchises and other promising properties: *Star Trek* movies and TV series; *Star Wars*; more *James Bond* flicks; more *Rambo*; *Rocky* follow-ups; *Aliens*; *Stargate*; etc. To pitch Starlog, the studio licensing departments would send over early scripts from potential projects. Sometimes the reps would even drop in at our Park Avenue South offices to put on a dog-and-pony show to entice then-publisher Norman Jacobs. These mags were a bit of a gamble, as there was no finished film to pre-screen before contracts were inked. So, for every *Rambo* or *Star Trek II* blockbuster, there was a *High Road to China* or a *Joanie Loves Chachi* flop (ABC canceled the TV series the day our standalone came out). Unlike the movie, Starlog's *Battlefield Earth* sold well enough because Scientologists were urged to buy it. Star/producer John Travolta even handed a copy to Jay Leno on *The Tonight Show*!

Then you had the ones that got away: Deals never came together for *Ghostbusters*, *Wayne's World* and *RoboCop*. Or in the case of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, Norm ripped up the licensing agreement when Steven Spielberg wouldn't turn over pics of the friendly alien until after the movie came out. This would delay printing by months and threaten sales if the movie didn't perform. Well, it *did* perform!

Editing the bulk of these publications was the indefatigable David McDonnell, whose duties already included getting STARLOG, COMICS SCENE, FANGORIA (issues 50-62) and other spinoff magazines out the door every month. Norm always said that Dave managed to squeeze the 25th

THE GOLDEN AGE OF FANGO ONE-SHOTS: PRIMED FOR A RETURN?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hour out of the 24-hour day to meet his gargantuan workload. He edited well over a hundred tie-ins: *Total Recall*, *Starship Troopers*, *Spaceballs*, *Willow* and countless *Star Treks*, to name a few. But when it came to horror movie one-offs, Norm turned to me…

Fango sales skyrocketed whenever we put top-killer Krueger on the cover, so for *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child*, the boss decided it was time that Freddy got his own one-shot. Once the film wrapped, as eager editor, I headed over to New Line Cinema's Manhattan offices and plowed through thousands of slides to illustrate the magazine. The ideal collaborators, New Line publicity gave us access to everyone on the production and exclusive set access.

As with any licensed item, the licensor reserved the right to review the product before it hit the streets, ordering changes if something didn't pass muster with corporate PR or the filmmakers. Understandably, all text had to be 100-percent complimentary, and the tie-in had to reflect the film in the most positive light. Fortunately, on the New Line single issues I edited (*Nightmare*s 4-5, *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*, *Jason Goes to Hell* and *Freddy vs. Jason*), the studio green-lit everything with zero alterations.

Such would not be the case with our 1996 *Island of Dr. Moreau* glossy. Starlog acquired the rights for this one before the shit hit the fan, largely based on original director Richard Stanley's awesome preproduction art and news that Oscar-winner Stan Winston would be creating the Beast People. Then Stanley got fired, the cast got shuffled and everything that could go wrong on location in Australia *did*. New Line went over our text with a fine-tooth comb and shredded copy left and right. In our "Making of" piece, they even objected to a passage about a thunderstorm that delayed a morning's filming! The changes proved so severe that our chief writer, Bill Warren, took his name off his articles.

The only other studio hassles I endured on a license assignment were on Roland Emmerich's 1998 *Godzilla* remake. For starters, no one in the office particularly liked the script. I also warned Norm that Emmerich and producer/co-writer Dean Devlin would never release any pictures of the mighty monster before the film opened, just as they had withheld alien pics from their previous success, *Independence Day*.

Norm figured they'd eventually capitulate and signed up for *two* all-different *Godzilla* mags, with me at the helm. My prediction came true: Studio TriStar refused to supply images of the giant monster, just a glimpse of its foot! For the poster mag, we were allowed to use preproduction paintings of *Godzilla*. Somehow, that slipped by Devlin. When the tie-in came out two weeks before the film opened, an angry Devlin called Norm and screamed at him for breaking his contract. (The licensor also put the kibosh on the second *Godzilla* movie mag's lengthy section on the Toho films. We moved Michael Gingold's comprehensive retrospective into FANGORIA instead.)

The other 1990s licensed magazines I edited (*Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight*, *The Addams Family*, *The Crow: City of Angels*, *Spawn* and *Species*) went off without a hitch and most sold well. They were beautifully designed by our crack art department, and creative director Bill Mohalley, unchained by FANGORIA's filmstrip template, designed some of the best covers of his long career.

Toiling on this memorable line of one-shot magazines, the staff and I had been granted a license to thrill. And we had plenty of fun doing it.

Michael Gingold's
Exordium

MICHAEL CRICHTON'S PRESCIENT *LOOKER* HAD ALBERT FINNEY PEERING INTO OUR OWN NEAR FUTURE.

What We're AfrAId Of

A report on the complicated state of AI affairs in the film industry.

In September, *Variety* broke the news about a Halloween double feature headed to AMC Theaters: Babak Anvari's *Hallow Road* and Stéphan Castang's *Vincent Must Die*. It was encouraging to see that a couple of genre movies from overseas directors were getting U.S. theatrical booking – but there was a detail that trade story left out. When the official press release about the pairing was released an hour later, it revealed that *Vincent* had been dubbed into English, via an artificial-intelligence program developed by Flawless.

This tech had previously been used to dub the Swedish science fiction film *Watch the Skies*, which hit U.S. screens in May. Although the PR described the process as "critically-acclaimed," Robert Daniels of RogerEbert.com opined, "Something about the alignment of the face and voice threw me off in a way that even cartoonish dubbing doesn't."

The reaction from viewers in online forums to the Flawless dubbing of both *Skies* and *Vincent* has been mixed at best, with the phrase "uncanny valley" coming up more than once.

What didn't occur was a wider sense of dissent from horror fans over the AI alteration of *Vincent*. Certainly, the response was nothing compared to the Internet uproar that resulted when it was revealed that a few AI still images had been used in *Late Night With the Devil*. These graphics appeared for only seconds in the movie, and their creation didn't take a job away from anyone, but that didn't stop the calls for a boycott of *Late Night*. (Of course, such calls have a spotty track record, and *Late Night* had the biggest opening weekend in IFC Films' history and became its most successful horror release ever.)

If you ask me, the wholesale alteration of *Vincent*'s performances is a lot more troubling than AI being applied to a few incidental images – and the ramifications go beyond

the general objections to generative AI. The easier it becomes to use this kind of dubbing tech, the more it will likely be applied to foreign-language films by distributors with their eyes on the widest possible box-office appeal. Five years from now, the next *Godzilla Minus One* or *Parasite* or *Pan's Labyrinth* might only be available on big screens in English, with those who want to view it in the original language having to wait for video/streaming releases. It's not hard to imagine international filmmakers with sufficient clout putting clauses in their contracts requiring that their movies be released Stateside in their native tongues.

One such auteur might well be Guillermo del Toro, who told NPR in October, "AI, particularly generative AI – I am not interested, nor will I ever be interested… I'd rather die." No doubt his view on the subject is shared by a lot of directors, though a dissenting view is held by veteran Paul Schrader. "I think we're only two years away from the first AI feature," he said in a *Vanity Fair* interview that posted the day after del Toro's. "[N]ow you're a pixelator, and you can create the face, and you can create the emotion on the face, and you can sculpt it the same way an author sculpts the reaction in a novel or a story."

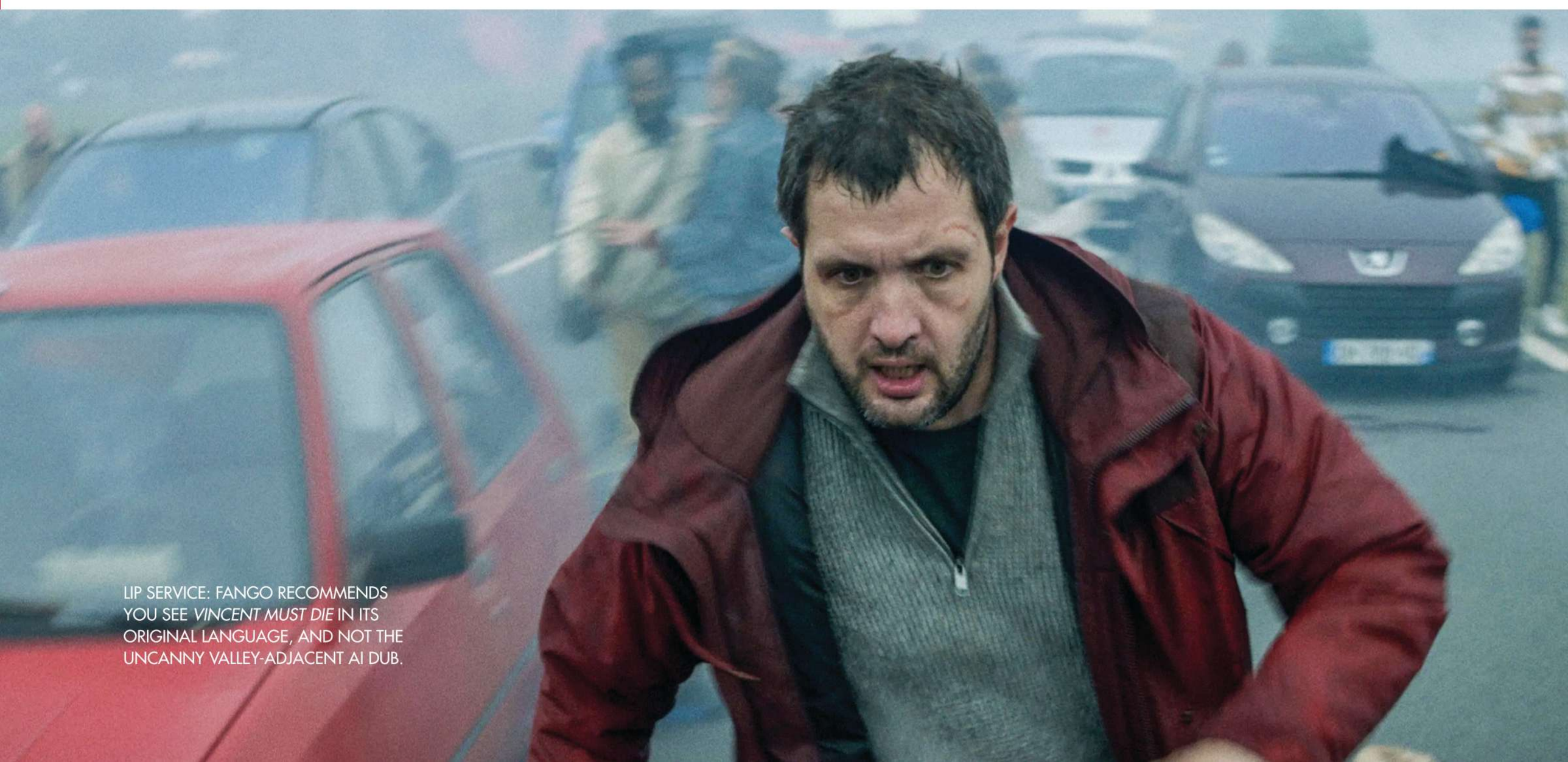
But can you get a truly honest, emotional performance out of AI? That's one of the questions at the center of the firestorm that greeted the arrival of AI-generated "actress" Tilly Norwood. The news that a number of Hollywood agencies were vying to sign Norwood was met with protests from SAG-AFTRA and plenty of flesh-and-blood thespians quite rightly concerned about the future of their craft. The prospect of both actors losing work and audiences losing performances with genuine feeling behind them is indeed worrisome, while the money men behind the movies look for ways to streamline costs and exercise more control over their product. It's a touch ironic that this brings to mind the Ian Malcolm quote from *Jurassic Park*, that landmark in the use of CG characters, albeit non-human ones: "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should."

(It's worth noting that Michael Crichton, author of the *Jurassic Park* novel that includes a version of Malcolm's line, saw all this coming decades ago. His 1981 thriller *Looker*, about computer-generated actors being used in TV commercials, was critically derided and a box-office flop at the time, but now seems remarkably prescient.)

The argument has been complicated by the growing number of Hollywood names, including Michael Caine and Matthew McConaughey, who have signed on with audio companies like ElevenLabs, which offers AI replications of famous voices – largely, until now, belonging to deceased celebrities. This Iconic Voice Marketplace, according to ElevenLabs, "solves a key ethical challenge in AI-driven media creation by enabling the ethical sourcing and licensing of some of the world's most recognizable voices." Beyond all the ethical thorniness, the question of licensing voices (and faces) of actors no longer with us will no doubt prove tricky.

AI encroachment into film production seems sadly inevitable, though the hope is that moviemakers with sufficient control over their projects will reject the depersonalized process in creating their features. Meanwhile, those of us on the journalistic side will be watching, and continuing to share our voices in the face of the AI-ization of online movie "writing." The Internet has now become rife with obviously AI-generated, frequently erroneous "articles" and "reviews" – and sadly, Schrader seems OK with that. He said in the *Vanity Fair* interview: "AI does better coverage than the average coverage. And AI doesn't have to favor anybody. Often, when you're doing coverage, you get a hint that the person who's paying you wants you to like this. You can't give that information to AI."

Beyond the fact that this sounds a lot like the persistent fanboy refrain of "I disagree with this review, so the critic must have been paid off!", Schrader is kidding himself if he thinks AI "coverage" represents honesty, and that it couldn't be manipulated for a positive point of view. And to suggest that film criticism should be a programmed response and not a personal one goes against the very nature of that craft. I would ask Schrader: Would you want your next film reviewed by AI based on the criticism of your past work, if the reactions to *The Canyons*, *Dying of the Light*, and *Forever Mine* were included in the mix? 💀



LIP SERVICE: FANGO RECOMMENDS YOU SEE *VINCENT MUST DIE* IN ITS ORIGINAL LANGUAGE, AND NOT THE UNCANNY VALLEY-ADJACENT AI DUB.

SceneQueen

KEEP IT BRIEF

CAN SHORT FILMS SAVE THE INDUSTRY?

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

Acting in a short is new for me. It had actually rarely come up until recently, but over the past couple of years I've been in a few: *Roger is a Serial Killer*, *The Blue Diamond* and, most recently, Brea Grant's *MLM*, which is now part of an anthology feature with Ed Dougherty and Chelsea Stardust added to the project as directors. The full-length feature, hitting festivals in 2026, is called *Grind*, and it's about the gig economy, fittingly.

THE AUTHOR (LEFT) WORKS WITH DIRECTOR BREA GRANT (RIGHT) ON HER SHORT FILM *MLM*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BREA GRANT

My new bounty of short-format opportunities seems to be the case for a lot of performers and filmmakers: short films and anthology segments are thriving, while other corners of the industry are struggling. For many years now I have been on the jury for Killer Shorts, a film-writing contest run by Alison Parker. And lately, short film submissions to film fests, especially the bigger festivals, can run in the thousands!

This past year *V/H/S/Halloween* debuted, and I think it's the best in this beloved, long-running series. While anthologies are somewhat of a different animal, each segment has to fulfill the same needs and hit the same beats as a short film, and should be able to stand on its own, away from the anthology framing.

Along those lines, Shudder's *The Creep Tapes*, from director Patrick Brice and now renewed for a third season, is killing it – literally! The show revolves around filmmaker Mark Duplass, whose serial killer character lures his victims via false pretenses, and then murders them at the end of each episode. These are essentially all stand-alone short films, with a running throughline.

I did a movie this past summer called *Subscriber*, and one of my castmates, Delaney Rowe, has

millions of followers on Instagram and TikTok. She does hilarious, mini-romcom videos which parody character tropes in movies. With these videos, she's built an audience and honed her storytelling skills. She's basically making short films while earning money from brand partnerships and advertising. No one gave her money to make these shorts upfront – she just did them on her own.

It's a shorts explosion! A takeover! And where does this take *us*?

Verticals – the miniature, soapy dramas featuring stories of love and betrayal and murder, intended to watch vertically on your phone in minutes-long episodes – are not just popular in China anymore. They are being produced at a rapid pace, with many companies across all nations getting in on the action. In the US, Cineverse is talking about launching their own platform, called MicroCo. It's a billion-dollar business worldwide.

Remember Quibi? They tried to do this a few years ago but it didn't take off. I'm no expert on why – maybe it was just a bit early for the States – but even so, the current booming vertical business is different from Quibi in a few ways.

Quibi wanted to use movie stars, and the cost to produce short films with big names was pretty high, with major players and studios in Hollywood behind the effort. In contrast, verticals like the popular ReelShort started out small, with no-name casts and easily digestible themes of honor and betrayal, lust and longing. Anyone can make a high concept short for little money.

Simple storytelling seems good for the short form, especially if you want to get people on small screens hooked on your shows. I often see this in the shorts-writing contest I mentioned above. The entries that have a simple and clear story with a beginning, middle and end are more satisfying on the page than a complex, 20-page story filled with descriptions of images I can't yet see.

DAVID DASTMALCHIAN TAKES A RELAXING DIP AS MARK DUPLASS LOOMS IN *THE CREEP TAPES*.

I think a lot of influencers and content creators on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are very good at this. Curry Barker has been making short-form comedy and horror films for a few years before being able to move to films. His movie *Obsession*, which premiered at The Toronto International Film Festival, debuts in May 2026 from Focus Features.

Obviously, making a great short can get one noticed and onto the feature track – think Chloe Okuno's *Slut*, or Kane Pixels' *The Backrooms* and Dylan Clark's *Portrait of God*. A great short can pave the way for representation and funding for features, but I'm seeing something else blooming...

Lately I'm seeing shorts for shorts' sake, the viability of using them to monetize for yourself, not waiting for someone to give you a budget to make something, and a chance to be highly creative and be the master of your own destiny.

Platforms are changing. It's not just about the big distributors anymore. Young creatives have been using YouTube, TikTok and Instagram for years now. It's really starting to pay off, and will surely change the landscape in ways we don't even realize yet.

I predict horror shorts will be even bigger in the very near future. Now excuse me while I start to work on another one myself... 💀

FOR *V/H/S/HALLOWEEN*, CASPER KELLY'S "FUN SIZE" IS JUST THAT.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER • (TOP) BY JOHN BAKER

Killing It:

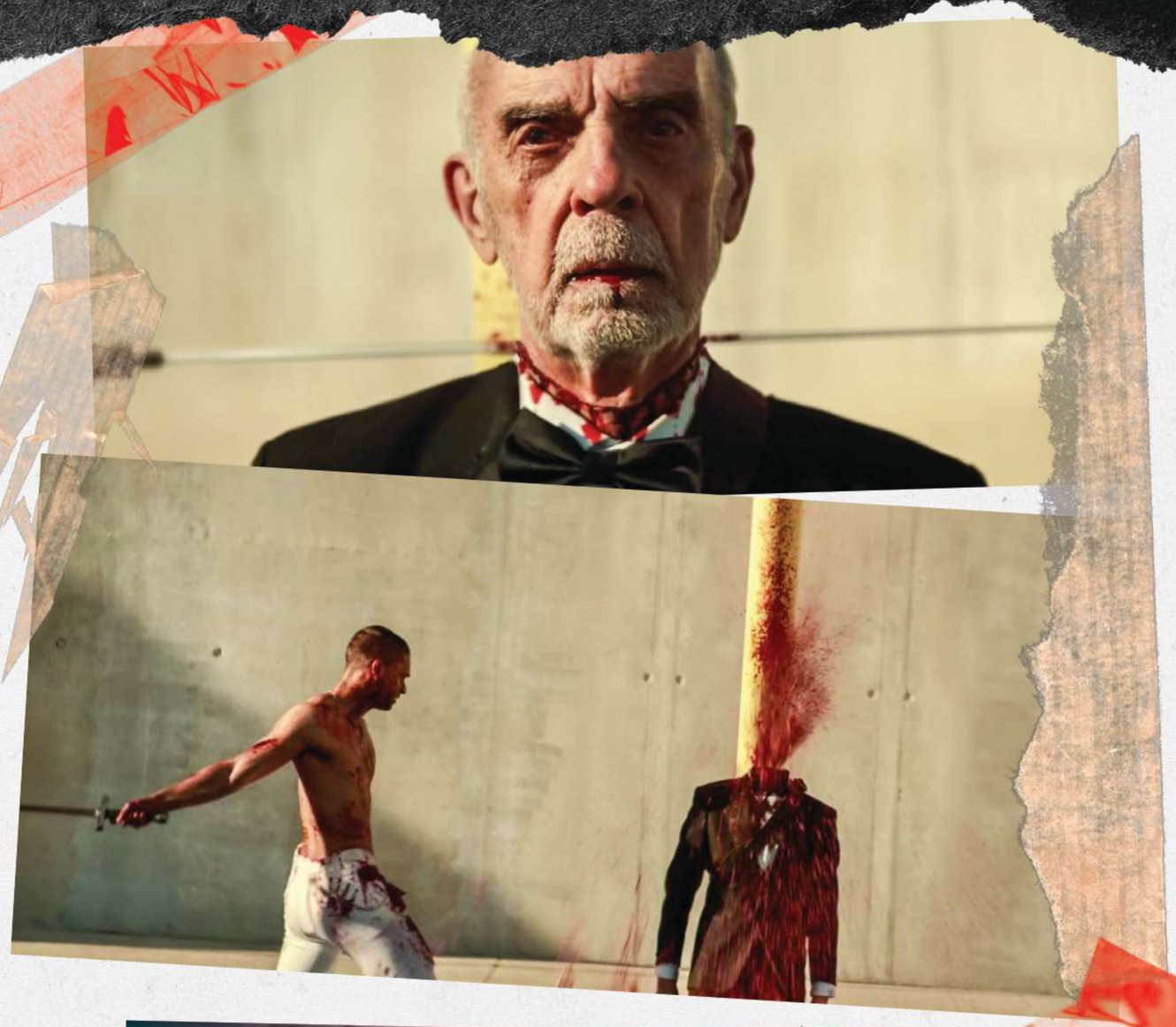
BY MATT DONATO

2025's Best Deaths In Horror

As we wrap another year with no shortage of gory gratification, let's toast those horror creators and effects crafters who engage in the grandest spectacle of on-screen kills. It's been another banner year for iconic horror franchises furthering their legacies, but don't count out some bloodthirsty indie underdogs. Deadly game show consequences, explosive electrocutions, a trick 'r treater stuffed with candy, the works. They all deserve their special highlight here in the pages of FANGORIA.

10 HIM | It's Good!

Oh look, my obligatory blood geyser pick! Justin Tipping's *HIM* turns football fandom into a gauntlet of gore come the film's finale, where a hopeful quarterback superstar murders a bunch of old, crusty league owners. One such "Roger Goodell but even more evil" type is decapitated while standing against a goalpost, which reverberates as a callback to Cameron "Cam" Cade's first scenes. As the Jerry Jones stand-in loses his head, the torso stands still, erupting into a fountain of cherry-colored liquid. Cam stares for an absurdly long time, the blood squirting everywhere, finally ending when the killer athlete walks away and kicks the decapitated head like a fumbled ball. No need to split the uprights with the competition slain.



9 Heart Eyes | The Die-nery

There's a lot of crushing this year in horror deaths. In Josh Ruben's *Heart Eyes*, an Insta-hottie has her staged proposal ruined when the Heart Eyes Killer chases her into a winery's industrial press. She traps herself, hoping her pursuer doesn't discover her hiding place, but instead, HEK engages the machine. There's a small window the killer watches through, as the unlucky woman finds herself the newest flavor of red wine. As her head pops, a gusher of eye gunk and bodily juices shoots into the viewing glass, but the clincher is seeing human-grade wine spew from faucets into buckets.

8 The Long Walk

Setting The Tone

What's miraculous about *The Long Walk* is the impact each death achieves. Atop that list is Roman Griffin Davis' tone-setting demise as Curley, the first casualty of the Major's latest dystopian parade. Director Francis Lawrence eases us into what turns out to be cruel totalitarian grandstanding by endearing us to a roster of boys set to walk until they drop, but it isn't until Curley's death that we understand the pitiful sadness of the stakes at hand. Davis' youngster pleads as his leg cramps, while the Major's soldiers circle. A son, a grandson, barely into puberty, cries his eyes out as a gun is pointed at his head, which is eviscerated by a bullet that tears his cheek open like a flap of lunch meat. Your heart sinks, your gut tightens, and you realize just how unforgiving *The Long Walk* is about to become.

7 Predator: Killer of Killers

Eat The Shield

I'm going to celebrate Dan Trachtenberg's *Predator: Killer of Killers*, but surprisingly, not for a Yautja fatality. Scandinavian Viking huntress Ursa hacks her way through a warlord's troops, using a bevy of methods. My favorite happens when Ursa wedges her circular wooden shield to prevent two gigantic wooden doors from closing, as a soldier darts forward. Luckily for Ursa, her defensive tool is also bladed around the edges, especially a dug-out chunk. As Ursa's enemy swings his axe and misses, momentum carries the brute forward, neck first, into the crescent-shaped slicer. His head glides across the top of the shield, his body flopping under, in an effortlessly cool finisher that leaves Ursa looking like the badass she is.

6 The Toxic Avenger

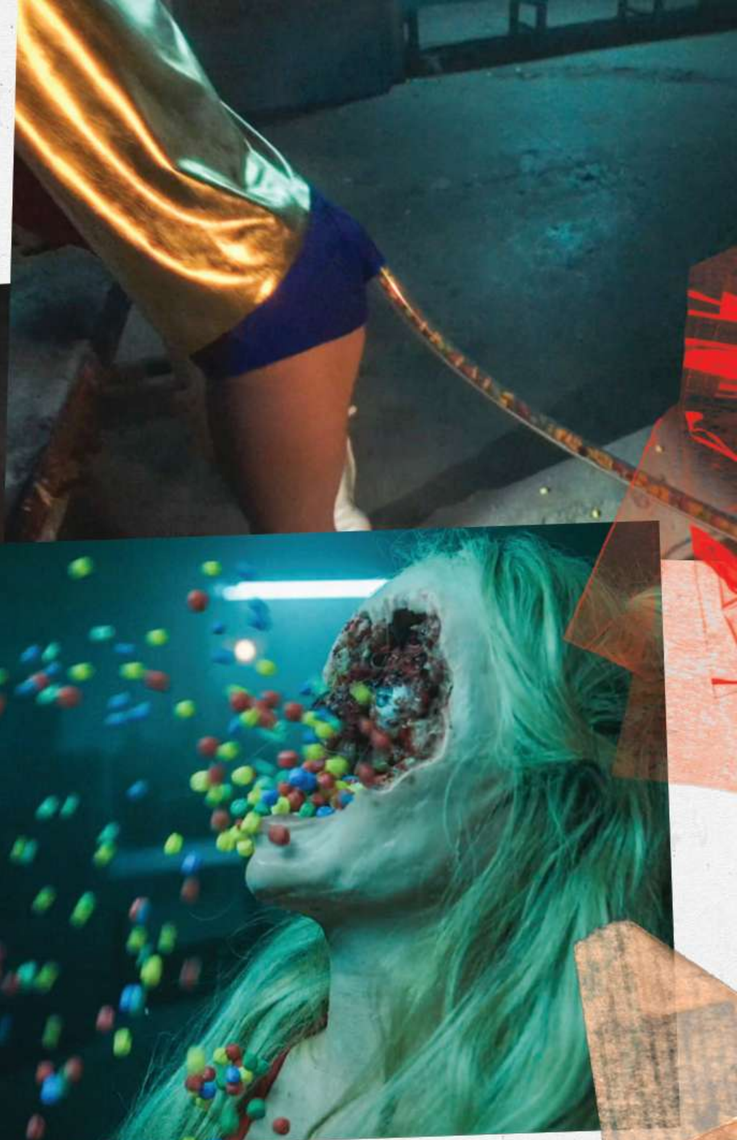
Miss Meat Massacre

Macon Blair's love of Troma movies is evident in the goopy nature of his *Toxic Avenger* remake. I'm cheating because technically there are multiple deaths in the fast-food joint scene, but everything happens so quickly, it feels like a single kill. Winston Gooze interrupts a hostage scenario at a Miss Meat location by viciously murdering the armed criminals in charge. Winston smashes a jaw to smithereens, decapitates another doofus in a football helmet, then shoves his arm up a third victim's rectum and tears out his intestines. Digital and practical effects seamlessly blend into a portrait of punishment covered in stringy tendons, chunky flesh bits, and removed organs dripping with reddened wetness. It does Troma proud, albeit with a few extra dollars.

HIM COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES, *HEART EYES* COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES, *THE LONG WALK* COURTESY OF LIONSGATE, *PREDATOR: KILLER OF KILLERS* COURTESY OF HULU, *THE TOXIC AVENGER* COURTESY OF CINEVERSE

5 V/H/S/Halloween | Candy-Coated Kill

Casper Kelly's *V/H/S/Halloween* segment "Fun Size" is about a human-processing candy factory and, from the lunatic behind "Too Many Cooks," it's deviously silly. One kill in particular had me choking back laughter, when a superhero-costumed young woman has yummy candies pumped into her bum and out of her face. It's a shotgun blast of colorful, artificial munchables – think M&Ms or gumballs – fed into a tube and out the gaping facial cavity where a profile once existed. Death sure has a strange sense of humor sometimes, turning a sugar rush into a butt-chugging treat cannon.



4 Weapons | The Happy Hag Meal

Whether you like it or not, Zach Cregger knows how to shock us with a finale. In *Weapons*, the comedian-turned-horror-storyteller blends humor and tragedy as Gladys' scheme backfires. The same children who found themselves supernaturally kidnapped by Gladys become heat-seeking berserkers who tear her into itty pieces. Amy Madigan's suburban hag looks like chewed-up haggis when the kids are done with her, as they claw the pruny woman's body into messy leftovers. The children push their stubby fingers into her eyes, gnaw her flesh open, and turn her neck into a sprinkler by ripping her head off at the jawline. It's barbaric, it's blood-soaked, and it's the perfect ending for Gladys' grim fairytale.

3 Your Host | A Splitting Headache

You know those hydraulic press videos on social media, where random objects are squished into oblivion? DW Medoff's *Your Host* replicates that but with a screaming girl's head and a sharpened attachment. Jackie Earle Haley stars as a psychotic game show host doing his own Jigsaw impression, with every contest leading to a violent outcome – and this one's no frills. Poor Melissa is chained in place and can only cower as a steel impaler separates her skull open down the middle. The slowness of the press is nightmare fuel, splitting hairs, flesh, and cranial bone much to the demented host's glee.

2 FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES

Bad Luck Garbage Truck

Unsurprisingly, *Final Destination: Bloodlines* is packed with gruesome highlights by Death's design. Filmmakers Zach Lipovsky and Adam Stein win our hearts with shocking kills using MRI machines or lawnmowers, but nothing's worse than garbage day. Poor Julia has her face smushed by the crushing weight of the truck's compactor, with the top of her head sticking above the pressure line. We see the life leave Julia's eyes as her jaw is crunched, her arm severed, and her face rearranged into a blood-gushing *Scream* mask expression. Credit actress Anna Lore with selling the abject terror of Julia's predicament, howling to the heavens as her impending flattening slides closer and closer.

1 THE MONKEY

Bikini Babe Explosion

Who knew Oz Perkins had a *Final Destination* bone in his body? *The Monkey* is an outstanding onslaught of graphic violence with a cheeky sense of humor. Hal is haunted by Death's touch, including poolside at a dingy motel. As Hal chats on the phone, a low-effort Rube Goldberg machine goes into effect: a janky air conditioner unit electrifies the inground swimming pool, exploding a bikini babe on impact as she dives in. Hal gasps in horror as the woman poofs into a crimson slurry, and a floppy, detached leg flies his way. It's cartoonish and over-the-top, but so powerfully unexpected. These are the kills that keep us horror fans coming back for more.

V/H/S/HALLOWEEN COURTESY OF SHUDDER, WEAPONS & THE MONKEY COURTESY OF NEON, YOUR HOST COURTESY OF BENACUS ENTERTAINMENT, FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

SARAH SQUIRM LIVE + IN THE FLESH

BY SARAH SQUIRM

My new HBO comedy special has everything you never wanted: exploding heads, popping pimples, dangling eyeballs, severed butts, bloody gums, loose teeth – and guts made of pipe cleaners, slime, glitter, pom-poms and SpaghettiOs. Don't watch this while eating (unless you're into that sort of thing).

I got to work with all my heroes: John Waters; the producers of *Marty Supreme*; the animators Sweaty Eddie, Rich Zim (*Pee Wee's Playhouse*) and David Daniels (*Freaked!*); and so many amazing artists, it makes my head spin (and explode).

If all this doesn't convince you to watch it, I literally don't know what will!! Oh, and by the way, there are jokes in it, too, but that's less exciting to talk about within the HALLOWED PAGES OF FANGORIA MAGAZINE!! It's an honor to be here, folks. I'm so excited, I could HURL! 🤮🤮🤮

PHOTO COURTESY OF HBO AND BY CODY CRITCHELOE

Couldn't do a stand-up special without licking my own eyeball.

Here's Izzi Galindo and Ethan Kamperman filling my head with goo, blood and and rotten bananas.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HBO AND BY GREG ENDRIES

Picture of me before getting my makeup done.

The most peaceful I've ever looked.

Goodbye, cruel world.

We asked if anyone in the audience was down to get Tupperwares full of blood splashed at them. They all said yes, for the most part...

ROHAN CAMPBELL IS MAKING ANOTHER HOLIDAY KILLING ROTATION

BY BRIAN W. COLLINS

THE *HALLOWEEN ENDS* BADDIE SLASHES HIS WAY INTO THE NEXT HOLIDAY HORROR FRANCHISE.

Here's what's great about going to repertory theaters in LA: you might attend a screening of a movie introduced by the film's producers, and two years later find yourself starring in a remake of that film for those very same people. That's what happened to Rohan Campbell; after years of knowing precious little about the *Silent Night, Deadly Night* franchise, the actor finally saw what all the fuss was about at one of the New Beverly Cinema's annual showings of the 1984 original. "That was the first time I saw it! The only thing I'd seen from the franchise were the 'Garbage Day!' memes, which are just excellent," the actor laughs.

That iconic meme is unsurprisingly referenced in the new *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, written and directed by Mike P. Nelson, who previously updated *Wrong Turn* for a modern audience. Unlike *Silent Night*, the previous update from 2012, this version retains the basic plot of the original: A young man named Billy Chapman sees his parents murdered on Christmas Eve by a guy in a Santa Claus suit, and when he gets older he snaps, puts on a suit of his own, and hunts down "naughty" people as the holiday draws near. Apart from a few nods to classic bits from the 1984 version (yes, there's an antler kill), Nelson and Campbell recreate Billy from the ground up, offering audiences a more sympathetic and tortured character than Robert Brian Wilson's take.

YEAH, IT'S A REIMAGINING, BUT DON'T FEAR: THIS *SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT* STILL KNOWS WHAT YOU WANT.

"As an actor, I love horror. Clearly, it's where I end up," Campbell explains. "To me, the fun part of the job – beyond all the effects, the blood, the gore, the killing, and all that – is the character arc stuff. The original film is sort of like a jab, right-hook plot, you know? *'Here's the context, now enjoy the splatter!'* But [in our version], without getting too ranty or anything, you get a little more context to Billy. He has this sort of everyman thing to him, which also brings a bit of humor and levity to what's in the movie."

Even better, Campbell gets to handle both sides of the character himself. In the original *Silent Night*, the young actors playing Billy as he grew up got the bulk of the character development, and most of the sympathy you feel for Billy is because of the scenes involving the kids. By the time Wilson takes over, there isn't much room for his own character work before the movie becomes a series of killings. He's also essentially mute (beyond shouting "Punish!"), not to mention the plot leaving him off-screen to check in with the two nuns, the cops, random bullies, and so on. Nelson's reimagining puts adult Billy in nearly every scene, either by himself or with Ruby Modine's Pamela, who also works at the Christmas craft store where he has taken up a part-time job.

It's a similar setup to the one Campbell played out in *Halloween Ends*, but his romance with Allyson in that film needed to blossom quickly because the runtime had to give equal focus to Laurie Strode and Michael Myers. That's not the case here, as there are no other major characters to focus on, giving Campbell and Modine time to really flesh out their relationship and make it believable. They were given the opportunity to work out their dynamic off-screen, as well. "We both really just wanted to talk a lot about the push and pull," Campbell explains. "Like, what page in the script is Pamela starting to give in a little bit? How charming can Billy be before he's turning on *Hollywood* charisma? Because that's not who Billy is."

In a perhaps even trickier performance, Modine actually makes it believable that Pamela would be into Billy, even after learning he is a serial killer. Campbell rightfully has nothing but praise for his co-star. "Working with Ruby was great because she had the same sort of mindset that I did," he says. "It was like, 'Let's really map this out and show the audience each step of the way so we can have this payoff,' where this horrible thing happens to Ruby when her dad gets killed, and Billy gets to step up." If you've seen the film, you know that Billy isn't the only villain, and his side gig as a Santa Slasher actually has its benefits when the two set out to avenge the death of her father. As Campbell explains, "We're at the part of that relationship where it makes a lot of sense for Billy to be like, 'Well, we could *deal* with

BLOODY SANTA SUIT: CHECK; BIG-ASS AXE: CHECK. *SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT* ICONOGRAPHY SECURED.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CINEVERSE, STUDIOCANAL & SCREAMBOX

WE DON'T MEAN TO PRY, BUT SANTA MIGHT WANNA GET THAT LOOKED AT.

that…' and [Pamela's] like, 'What do you mean?' We've hit that point in the film where he has to download his life to this girl that he's in love with. Without that earlier character development, I think that relationship just isn't three-dimensional. So it really paid off that way."

Some might balk at a slasher film that doesn't spend a lot of time on the victims, but considering the targets for *Silent Night*'s centerpiece massacre sequence, it's unlikely that anyone would want to spend much time with them anyway. At one point, Billy is annoyed by a loudmouth at a hockey game and follows her to cross her off his "naughty list," only to discover she's running a Nazi Christmas party. So, in an epically crowd-pleasing sequence, Billy walks in, locks the door, and proceeds to lay waste to all of them with his trusty axe. It's a massive set piece that was shot in a surprisingly short amount of time.

"I think we shot that in a day and a half? We were run and gun on this movie," Campbell explains. "On these productions, you're on a tighter budget and there's not a lot of time, and it's one of those things where you know what the sequence is, so let's run through it and try and get as much of the piece as possible." It's probably easier when you know that what you're doing will make audiences cheer. Campbell laughs at the memory of filming the sequence: "Dude, how often do you get to kill Nazis at work? I'm in a bar in the middle of Winnipeg, doing that, then going home and going to bed. It's crazy!"

"To me, the fun part of the job — beyond all the effects, the blood, the gore, the killing — is the character arc stuff." -Rohan Campbell

The closest the film comes to having a third lead character is Charlie, the man who kills Billy's parents and, after his own death, possesses the young man and guides him toward his murderous doings. Unlike the original Billy's rather random, first and only spree, this incarnation has to kill someone every day of December to fulfill a sort of messed-up advent calendar, and as we learn through some fun, often-gory flashbacks, Billy's been at this for so long that he's kind of over it. "What's so fun about this

BILLY'S GOT BLOOD ON HIS HANDS IN THIS ONE, BUT THE REASON WHY MIGHT SURPRISE YOU.

idea is that Mike [Nelson] did this thing where it's like, 'Billy's been doing this forever and he's exhausted by it, he doesn't want to do it anymore,'" Campbell says. "There's this mundaneness to it, and then we let Pam sort of take the audience's perspective, which is such a fun little piece for her, to be like, 'So… this is what you DO?' And he's like, 'Yeah, but… I *have* to.'"

This uneasy codependent relationship between Charlie and Billy gives more context to how this sweet little boy turns murderous, while adding a bit of a supernatural element to the proceedings that previous iterations of *Silent Night, Deadly Night* lacked. But Charlie is just a voice in Billy's head – so who spoke those lines for Campbell during filming? "I was acting with Mike [Nelson]!" Campbell reveals with amusement. "Mike had the script in his hand, and he just wanted to ball with me, so that's what we did. But it is odd acting with just dead space, when no one's in the room. It's really fucking hard!"

Assuming *Silent Night, Deadly Night* is a success, Campbell himself will be taking over those duties. If the sequel follows the ending of this one (continuity has never been this franchise's strong suit, as fans can attest), Billy will be the voice in Pamela's head as she becomes the new Santa. "I wonder how that dynamic shifts and what Mike does with it," Campbell wonders. "There are so many windows that open… imagine your partner being in your head and hearing all your thoughts? That is my nightmare. That's *everybody's* nightmare! If your partner knew what you were thinking at all times, it'd be insane!"

BLOOD, CHRISTMAS, FEET: THIS PHOTO IS SOMEONE'S KINK. WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOU'RE WELCOME.

Whatever the plan is, Campbell is game. "I'd be so eager to read what Mike wants to do with it, because there's so much humor in it and you can revive the conflict in a very real way. It'll be a really deserved sequel from that angle. And that's all I want in a sequel, for there to be enough meat on the bone. I'd be super happy to come back; I mean, I'd be in it so I'm biased, but I really feel it'd be an adventure with this character to carry over in that way. And also to see Ruby Modine: crazy cinematic serial murderer!"

With *Silent Night, Deadly Night* and *Halloween Ends* under his belt, Campbell has begun to carve out a niche as a sympathetic killer in holiday slasher movies, prompting us to wonder: Which holiday is next? Campbell laughs at the similarities, but answers with his own query:

"Here's a better question: why does everyone see me as that guy? How did that happen? But I think it'll be fun to do, like, a bank holiday, something totally mundane. One of those holidays where we're like 'Why is this a holiday?' That's up next!"

YES, THAT KILL IS STILL IN THE MOVIE.

DOLLY SMEAREST: THINGS GET MESSY FOR DOLLY (MAX THE IMPALER), CHASE (SEANN WILLIAM SCOTT) AND MACY (FABIANNE THERESE).

DOLLY

DELIVERS OLD-SCHOOL HORROR MAYHEM

By Charles Moss

Rod Blackhurst's 16mm nightmare embraces the indie spirit of the '70s.

"So the baby bottle has tapioca in it?" I ask director Rod Blackhurst on the set of *Dolly*, the follow-up to his acclaimed crime thriller *Blood for Dust*.

"Tapioca pudding and maybe green Apple Jacks that have been degraded a little bit, so they look like moldy chunks," he confirms.

It's my third day on set. The twenty-day shoot ends tomorrow, and the cast and crew are exhausted and energized knowing the end is near. Then post-production begins.

Blackhurst is giving me a tour of the interior set his production team built inside a former cosmetics factory off Amnicola Highway, an industrial-heavy stretch of road that leads into the heart of downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee's tourist district. We're standing in a dilapidated kitchen that looks like it hasn't been cleaned or decorated since the early 1980s.

"And then this is just lentil vegetable soup… Campbell's," Blackhurst tells me, pointing toward the puke-green substance splattered on the dingy white kitchen table, where thin, dried blood stains smattered with dirt and grime surround it on the floor. It looks like a struggle took place there.

"Well, it's split pea and lentil," a crew member says, correcting Blackhurst.

"I think Fabianne [Therese] legit picked this from an offering," says Blackhurst, noting that it was one of the only simulated vomit concoctions made by the props team she was willing to put in her mouth.

While the vomit is fake, the flies hovering above it are very real.

Therese plays Macy, a young woman abducted by Dolly, a monstrous figure played by NWA champion Max the Impaler, who wants to raise her as its child, the way a little girl would treat her dolls.

"Today we're shooting from the middle third of the film where our protagonist wakes up inside of this dollhouse and has been given information that she needs to play along and be the toy, be the doll; that's the thing that will allow her to survive," says Blackhurst. "So, she's going through these series of insane things for any adult to be doing, which is like, pretending to be a baby for an adult that is [essentially] a baby, as well… so everything has this uncanny valley aspect to it because your brain cannot compute, and it's really twisted and fun."

Dolly – which also stars Seann William Scott, Ethan Suplee, Russ Tiller and Michalina Scorzelli – was written by Blackhurst and Brandon Weavil, whom he met through a writers' portal for underrepresented creators hosted by Witchcraft, the production company owned by Blackman and *Dolly* co-producer Noah Lang.

"Rod kind of came to me with a seed of an idea, and together we worked on it and expanded on it," says Weavil. "We just wanted to create a modern iconic horror villain, which I think we've been pretty successful in… We think Dolly's going to be pretty iconic."

The first half of *Dolly* takes place in the woods, which required the cast and crew to film in a remote, hard-to-access wooded area on nearby Signal Mountain. The way Blackhurst describes their approach to this movie sounds like Raimi shooting *The Evil Dead*. Like many low-budget horror films shot in the '70s and early '80s, *Dolly* is being shot with Super 16mm film, an homage to that period of filmmaking.

"I love and miss how punk rock horror used to be," Blackhurst tells me later over email. "Outsiders cobbling together movies that felt

MAX THE IMPALER IS UNDER *DOLLY*'S CREEPY MASK, AND IF WE WERE THEM WE'D BE TAKING THAT THING OFF ANY CHANCE WE GOT, TOO.

THERESE MAY HAVE HAD NICER DRESSING ROOMS ON OTHER SETS, BUT IT'S COOL TO SEE HER EMBRACING THE DIY INDIE SPIRIT OF *DOLLY*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROD BLACKHURST BY JOHN BLAZZI

dangerous and terrifying… making films like *Halloween* and *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and the New French Extremity movement."

But sometime over the past two decades, he says, Blackhurst feels like that punk rock spirit and misfit energy have been usurped by Hollywood's desire for more commercially appealing films.

"What's wild to me is that those films that inspired this new film were all commercially successful, just not relegated and approved by gatekeepers. Even after my first few films, I found myself asking and waiting for permission from people who always found a reason to say no," says Blackhurst.

"But we've always been the people who find reasons to say yes. And we've always embraced that mindset: 'How do we find a way to make this work?'"

Dolly producer Bryce McGuire knows this feeling well. His film *Night Swim* – which he and Blackhurst co-wrote – was released earlier this year, nine years after they made the short film on which it was based. As a producer on *Dolly*, he was excited about Blackhurst's back-to-basics-indie horror film vision, his desire to cut out the Hollywood middleman and simply make the best films possible without studio interference.

McGuire and Isaiah Smallman of Mama Bear Studios, another producer on the film, are both good friends with Blackhurst. Smallman, a Chattanooga native, sees the potential of Chattanooga to become a moviemaking town.

WITH THE HELP OF A TEENSY BIT OF CHROMA KEY TRICKERY, MR. SCOTT SPENDS ENTIRELY TOO MUCH OF THIS MOVIE WITH HIS JAW HANGING OFF. YOU DO NOT GET USED TO IT.

"We're kind of having an indie renaissance right now because of contraction in the studio system and people getting more skittish about market softness and whatever," says McGuire, as Smallman, who's been my set tour guide, leads us outside to watch a stunt. "It's exciting. There are a lot of people that are going to that model because they feel the system's a little bit broken and they want to control their own destiny."

Smallman chimes in as we watch Therese's stunt double Michelle Adams, dressed in a bloodstained white dress, standing on a yellow scissor lift in front of a blue screen, preparing to jump onto a pile of black safety mats and cardboard boxes a few feet below her.

"In terms of the system changing, it's not just that there are new ways to make the movies, but there are new ways to distribute them without the traditional methods," he says as the camera operators get into position for the shot.

"When it's all said and done, and [the movie] does its thing and reaches an audience, we all want to ride the tide of that," says McGuire.

Smallman stresses the importance of connecting with your audience when it comes to making any kind of art, but especially genre films. With so much money involved in filmmaking, you get one chance to do it right, and if you don't, you typically don't get a second chance. "I don't give a shit about

"(This is) what made us want to become filmmakers in the beginning: going into the woods with your friends, making shit."

- Rod Blackhurst

DOLLY TENDS TO MAMA, WHO'S LOST… YOU KNOW WHAT, I CAN'T WITH THE PUNS. THIS IS HORRIBLE. SHE'S *DEAD*, FOR GOD'S SAKE. DEAD!

THERESE SHIELDS HER FACE FROM INTRUSIVE PAPARAZZI ON SET.

getting rich," he says. "Getting to the point where I can make what I want to make… very, very motivating. And I'm seeing this on this project all day. With genre, you get to have fun. You do what you want to do, as long as you deliver the scares."

Chattanooga, it turns out, was the place to make this a reality. It also doesn't hurt that the Chattanooga Film Festival, which just celebrated its 12th year, has become a destination festival for horror filmmakers and fans. After Blackhurst, who lives in Nashville, told Smallman and McGuire about his new project, they encouraged him to consider filming it in Chattanooga.

"They told us that there's this incredible creative community here that has this desire and wants to be making things," says Blackhurst. "There doesn't seem to be anything else taking up space in the room creatively [in Chattanooga]. In Nashville and other cities, you have the music industry, you have tourism, you have these other things that sort of draw energy and take a lot of the attention that exists there. Here there's just incredible artistry and openness, and there's this willingness for something to happen, and that's been magical. We saw that early on and said, 'Well, let's make this movie in Chattanooga.'"

Blackhurst admits that, above everything else, it was the prospect of getting to make movies with the people he loves that was the most appealing factor for making a film like *Dolly*. Rather than attempt to make films in Hollywood, he says, why not make an indie film with your friends, where you own it entirely and you can give fans what they're looking for. Besides the obvious resources to make it happen, he says, you need a lot of people to believe in what you're doing.

"Learning what we have over the past couple of movies and just going, 'Man, I feel like we can do this in a way that can deliver on those things,' and it would be the thing that the 13-year-old me would have lost my marbles to watch," says Blackhurst.

"And then how can we do it in a way that we don't have to answer to anybody? I want to have control over my path versus just waiting for my phone to ring, so I can live in a place like Nashville, so our friends can live in a place like Chattanooga, and we can do our own thing… That's what made us want to become filmmakers in the beginning: going into the woods with your friends, making shit. I'll admit you get sold a bill of goods about Hollywood and the studio dream and you go, 'Oh man, it's for sure going to happen.' Yeah, not really. It might, but you can't plan on it. This is harder. It takes work. It takes hustle. But at least you're choosing your path."

IT'S JUST LIKE THE YEAH YEAH YEAHS SAID IT WOULD BE.

PRODUCER NOAH LANG, HOPING DOLLY SLASHES HER WAY TO THE UPPER ECHELONS OF HORROR ICONS.

WE'VE HEARD OF BECOMING ONE WITH NATURE, BUT COME ON.

THE ADAMS FAMILY DIGS DEEPER WITH MOTHER OF FLIES

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

THE FAMILY OF FILMMAKERS TAPS INTO INTIMATE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH THEIR LATEST, A CANCER PARABLE TURNED WITCHY HORROR.

The filmmaking Adams Family – John Adams, Toby Poser, Zelda Adams and Lulu Adams – have been weaving their own lives into their cinema from their first horror film, 2019's *The Deeper You Dig*. "Zelda was only 12 at the time, and starting to go out into the world alone, and there was this fear of her getting kidnapped or something terrible happening, so we made a movie about that," John recalls.

But the family, whose subsequent features include *Hellbender*, *Where the Devil Roams* and *Hell Hole*, has never made a movie as deeply personal as *Mother of Flies*. Winner of the Cheval Noir Award for Best Film at last summer's Fantasia International Film Festival (where Fango spoke with the Adamses), and debuting on Shudder in early 2026, it was inspired by especially troubling developments in their lives.

"Toby and I had both had cancer, and Zelda tested for proclivity for the same one Toby had," John explains. "We were talking about it a lot, and in the nature of the way we make

SOMETHING VERY BAD HAPPENED IN THESE WOODS, AS SOFIA MACALUSO CAN ATTEST.

films, we started saying, 'We should make a film about this and really talk about it.'"

"We'd been talking about making a fairy tale for a long time," Poser adds. "Because we live in the woods [of upstate New York], we're always conjuring up ideas and riffs on things like Hansel and Gretel. So it felt very natural to be back in the woods, where we're most comfortable, and this became our dark, twisted fairy tale."

In *Mother of Flies*, Zelda plays Mickey, a college student afflicted with an unspecified cancer. Chemotherapy and other treatments have proven futile, so she and her father Jake (played by John) drive deep into a forest to meet Solveig (Poser), whose much older practices hold the promise of a cure. Her introductory scene makes it clear she has a darker purpose, and her folk magic begins to have an even more corruptive effect on Mickey than the disease she carries. (Lulu has a small role as a motel desk clerk.)

"A lot of the visuals and definitely the conversations are pulled from Toby's and my experiences," John elaborates. "In my case, I didn't have insurance, so I went through cancer in a clinic, and I was in a room with other people who didn't have any money. There were 20 of us doing chemo together, and I made real connections with these people, because we were all fighting for our lives. A lot of the stories you hear in the film are taken from that group."

For Zelda, "My approach was trying to take as much care as possible from my parents' stories, and take their direction, and explore all the different aspects of how tough it is, having cancer and being sick. There's a scene where Solveig and I are talking about the ocean, and John was very specific about how he directed me, and for me not to just be sad the whole time."

"We worked very hard on that scene," John says, "to talk about something that's sad with strength, instead of saccharine melancholy. A lot of times, when you see movies about cancer or something like that, there are a lot of heavy violins. It was important to us to almost celebrate the struggle."

Another key factor in *Mother of Flies* is the natural world in which Solveig dwells, and from which she draws her powers. The movie is rife with images of animal, insect, and plant life, often observing the characters through trees and other vegetation, spiderwebs, etc. The forested area in which the Adamses live, and where they shot *Mother of Flies*, had a heavy influence when it came to scripting Solveig's occult lore.

"We love nothing more than inventing witchcraft!" Poser says. "I like to read books about it, and I love mythology, especially women in mythology. We reached into our most primitive selves to come up with Solveig's spells, and a lot of them were based on the nature that's around us. You can't help but have that rub off when you're living so close to the woods, and the life and death that are around you nonstop."

"We were initially talking about filming the movie in the winter," Zelda reveals. "We love shooting in winter, because it's so beautiful and stark and the contrasts are so heavy. But I'm happy we didn't wait for that, and shot it in the summer, because it's a time

SOLVEIG (TOBY POSER) IS ABOUT TO MAKE IT REAL WEIRD FOR HER NEW GUESTS.

JAKE (JOHN ADAMS) LEARNS THE HARD WAY NOT TO DRINK WHATEVER SOMEONE HANDS YOU.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MOONDOG PICTURES, THE ADAMS FAMILY & TREY LINDSAY

AS MAYA ANGELOU SAID, "WHEN SOMEONE SHOWS YOU WHO THEY ARE, BELIEVE THEM THE FIRST TIME." WOULD *YOU* GO INTO THIS HOUSE?

that's saturated with life, and that's a contrast to what Mickey and Solveig are going through."

"Nature is our lead actress," John says. "We talked so much about where to put the camera so that in almost every shot, you're almost spying through nature at what's going on. And it wasn't just the visuals; it was the sound of the birds, even the spiders crawling through the grass, the bugs, the flies, just to show the absolute saturation of life, while this person is struggling with death."

The visual FX, by the Adamses' regular collaborator Trey Lindsay (see following page), and the homegrown production design also have a lot to do with that atmosphere. Solveig's home is decorated all over the inside with wood and bark, culled by the filmmakers from a nearby logging operation. On the outside, the house is wrapped in branches like tentacles – literally invaded by the nature around it.

"Trey is a compositing master," John says. "He gave us a lot of renditions of the house, which is our house; there were some that were completely fantastical, and then others that weren't fantastical, and he worked very hard, even on the types of trees growing into the house. We love working with Trey, because he's devoted to the art of it, and did a magical job of making the forest blend with that house."

Lindsay also had a lot to do with *Mother of Flies*' overall visual palette. This is the Adams Family's best-looking movie yet, and John relates, "I kind of color-corrected it, and then Trey and I had a lot of discussions about, how can we romanticize this a little bit? How can we make this look more like a myth, like a fairy tale? Trey then took it and added film look, and I think he even put a slight, almost blurry sheen on it so it started to look more like a '70s film than something shot on a digital camera. He took that kind of digital clarity out of the images."

Which is not to say that all of *Mother of Flies* is attractive to look at. Amidst the lush setting and eye-catching visuals, there are visceral moments in which the Adamses don't hold back on the blood, slime, and other unpleasant fluids. Poser, who created the makeup FX, says, "There's nothing more fun, right? When you're a kid, you play in the mud, and as adults, we were still playing, with blood – and also mud. We used a lot of mud [*laughs*]!"

The biggest gross-out in *Mother of Flies*, though, is one involving Jake and a startling amount of vomit and mucus. Even grosser, John reveals, "That was me really getting myself to throw up. I had eaten a bunch of refried beans, and then I put my fingers down my throat, and once I started to go through the vomiting, that made me vomit more, and I just kept the camera rolling."

"You always hate on Method Acting, but you were doing it!" Zelda interjects.

"That one, you know what, I did!" John responds. "That was real mucus, too. And then I had to clean it all up. But I love that people [at the premiere screening] laughed at that. I was so happy!"

Yet the true emotional takeaway the Adamses want for viewers is tied to their real-life history that inspired *Mother of Flies*. "I'm really inspired and proud of my parents for discussing their hard experiences with cancer through a really intimate film," says Zelda, and Poser adds, "I feel super lucky to do what we do. Most people out there won't know the backstory, so hopefully they'll see this as a dark fairy tale. But it is nice when we're in a place like Fantasia or talking to FANGORIA, and we can share the dark heart of this story." 💀

MAYBE ONE DAY THE ADAMS FAMILY WILL USE THEIR SCENIC PROPERTY TO FILM A WARM AND FUZZY STORY. *MOTHER OF FLIES* IS NOT THAT FILM.

ONE OF THE FAMILY

BY KALYN CORRIGAN

EFFECTS ARTIST AND FREQUENT ADAMS FAMILY COLLABORATOR TREY LINDSAY DISCUSSES **MOTHER OF FLIES**, AND HOW THE REAL MAGIC OF THE FILM IS CONJURED BY A TINY, TIGHT-KNIT CREW.

"I've joked before, but with the Adams Family, I'm kind of like the adopted stepchild they keep in the attic that they bring down when they need the weird effects stuff," effects artist Trey Lindsay says as we sit down to discuss his work on *Mother of Flies*. "Which I love – that's preferable to me. I don't want to jinx it, but there is this sort of wonderful assumption that I'll just be part of whatever they're doing."

Already widely known in the horror community for their highly stylized independent filmmaking crew, the Adams Family – made up of Toby Poser, John Adams and their daughters Zelda and Lulu – made waves back in 2019 with their much-acclaimed horror stunner *The Deeper You Dig*. Now, they're back with *Mother of Flies*, a phenomenal feat which, as their colleague and pseudo fifth family member Lindsay points out, feels like "their thesis film."

In the movie, a young woman named Mickey (Zelda) faces a terminal cancer diagnosis and seeks the aid of a woodland woman who goes by the name of Solveig (Poser), much to the chagrin of her widower father Jake (John). Running out of options, Mickey's willing to try any new-age method that might lend her a few more months of life – even if that means traversing to the dark woods in upstate New York to spend three days in a witch's hovel in the hopes of being healed by ancient magicks.

USING MINIATURES (FACING PAGE) AND VFX, LINDSAY STRETCHES THE ADAMS FAMILY'S PRACTICAL FX BUDGET AND EXPANDS THEIR WORLD-BUILDING.

"The storyline is very much a Hansel and Gretel fairytale," remarks Lindsay. "I mean, it's literally a couple going to the middle of the woods to the witch's house to find the cure for what they need. That's straight out of Brothers Grimm." Upon Mickey and Jake's arrival at the necromancer's door, they discover a rustic cottage tucked away within the trees, overgrown with Spanish moss, and propped up by robust roots that stretch deep into the dirt. To achieve the look, Lindsay used the family's real home as a backdrop, then composited a matte painting over the already existing structure.

"It's a matte painting that's built with photobashed elements from stock things," he explains. "I think the roots underneath the house are from a still photo I found of these trees in Florida that have the root system on the surface of the ground. I started with those, and put them underneath the house." For the greenery, "I found some imagery of houses in New Orleans and the bayou that have that dripping ivy off the sides of the porch. The matte paintings were done in Photoshop to look a lot more realistic and less painterly."

A fan of mixing the practical with the fantastical, Lindsay always aims to shoot as much in-camera as possible before falling back on visual aids. Take, for instance, a scene towards the end of the film, in which Solveig fully ingests a six-foot long snake before regurgitating the specimen back into Mickey's mouth moments later.

"There's something about using the real stuff; you can capture the imperfection of that snake," he muses. "If I was to animate a computer graphic snake going down Z's mouth, the temptation is to do a beautiful undulating creature. It could look cool, but it kind of gives it away, as opposed to the lethargic snake that they're pulling through a PVC pipe for the third time. That translates to a nonchalant reality that works so well within an effects shot."

A simple enough gag, Lindsay and company had Poser lie down on a rock and approximated where the reptile

AN EFFECT FOR THE FILM, OR THE AFTERMATH OF THE ADAMS' LEGENDARY WRAP PARTIES? WHO CAN SAY.

would need to be in order to pull off the imagery of the serpent flowing into her open mouth. Then, Poser moved, the crew placed the snake on the same rock next to where her body would be, shot the actual snake coiled up in the spot, and they composited the two images together in a sequence. To make it seem as though the snake actually slithered into her windpipe, they simply covered a PVC pipe in green cloth, fed the snake through the pipe, and erased the pipe from the video to make it appear as though it were traveling through a body.

"They literally fed the snake through the pipe," says Lindsay. "They got him so he was partially up through the pipe, and they would pull him so his body would retract through this little hole. Those were used for shots where you see Toby slurp the last of the snake in, or the snake going into Z's mouth. Those were green screen elements, but because it's vanishing in a hole, it was relatively easy to rotoscope the snake using Mocha Pro."

Twisting Poser's face into a believable supernatural being during flight, however, proved to be somewhat of a greater challenge. Luckily, Lindsay was very much up to the daunting task.

"As long as her perspective is relatively the same, you can get away with murder," Lindsay smiles. "For the one shot where she's flying, she roars and she's got her eyes all messed up and she looks all pissed off – Toby's face morphs, then goes back to normal. Her magic that she's using to be human slips when she's angry, and she's not worried about keeping up appearances." In a Picasso-esque move, Lindsay referenced his own bodily markings as substitutes for certain spots on Poser's face, all in order to create craters, calluses, and other deformities signifying something spiritual at work.

"It was a Photoshop painting that I did that was actually built out of my face," he recounts. "For her angry eyebrows, I took a picture of my own arched eyebrows and the way my forehead crinkles. I look amazingly monstrous when I put my features on Toby's face. She's got a messed-up eye that looks a little zombie-ish and rotted – that's actually a picture of my elbow. It has a bunch of little weird wrinkles and stuff. I built it around that, almost like fabrication, but digitally, where I take all these different disparate elements, and then the painting challenge is just matching the lighting and the color tones, so it looks like it's part of the original photography."

Fittingly, this mother of flies spent a majority of the production surrounded by real flies.

"There is only one shot where I did any fly work as a digital effect," Lindsay says. "There's some real live action where a little fly landed on [Poser]'s cheek, and then took off, and John was smart enough to be like, 'That's the take.' The flies are all real, except for one shot."

While the effects might be impressive, especially given the Adams Family's limited means of production, Lindsay argues that what really sets these filmmakers apart from other indie up-and-comers is the fact that they still believe in the magic of filmmaking. It's that enthusiasm and spontaneity that make working with this tiny crew so satisfying.

"I love the fact that they make movies like I did when I was a kid," smiles Lindsay. "They'll talk about an idea, get excited, and John will just grab the camera and be like, 'All right, tomorrow we're going to go film this scene.' And they don't even have the whole script yet, but he'll start filming, and editing, and they'll get the snowball rolling. A lot of their stuff is almost like when you're twelve, and you get excited, like, 'I just want to go make a movie. I don't want to sit down and write. I just want to start doing it.'"

He adds, "That level of excitement carries them all the way through the end of production and post-production. It's still amazing to me every time we finish something, and I see what they did."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MOONDOG PICTURES & TREY LINDSAY

LINDSAY WORKS HIS MAGIC ON LOCATION.

TALKING TO A SHADOW

SUSPENDED ON

BY SAMANTHA MCLAREN

STEP WITH US INTO THE FANTASTICAL WORLD OF BRYAN FULLER'S

DUST BUNNY.

AURORA (SOPHIE SLOAN) AND HER NEIGHBOR (MADS MIKKELSEN) FORM AN UNLIKELY ALLIANCE TO FIGHT THE MONSTER UNDER THE BED.

A broken light fixture dangles limply over the smashed remains of a canopy bed. A thick layer of feathers covers every surface, lifting into the air as crew members breeze past the open doorway.

"I wish you saw it before it was destroyed," sighs production designer Jeremy Reed.

The bedroom once belonged to the couple fostering Aurora (Sophie Sloan), the 8-year-old girl at the center of television veteran Bryan Fuller's feature directorial debut, *Dust Bunny*. Mommy and Daddy didn't believe Aurora about the monster under her bed. Judging by the state of their own, that was a huge mistake.

Luckily, the rest of the lushly designed set is faring better – for now. I'm standing in the kind of New York City apartment that a New Yorker like me can only daydream about as we pretend to ignore the piss smell in the subway: all Art Nouveau arches and exquisite wallpaper. Even the fire escapes look romantic.

"We're bringing Bryan's New York," teases visual effects supervisor Craig Lyn. "It's kind of like *Mary Poppins*, where they're up on the roof: Dick Van Dyke does his Cockney accent and he's dancing up there? That's Walt Disney's London. This is Bryan's New York."

I'd move into the apartment immediately (monster under the bed and all) if it weren't for the fact that we're not actually in NYC, but rather a studio on the outskirts of Budapest. It's my first time on a film set so everything is new and exciting, but nothing could quite prepare me for what it would feel like to step off the dusty studio floor and directly into Fuller's brain. Eclectic. Brightly colored. Deceptively vicious.

"There's a theme of the predator," Reed explains of the set design. The apartment walls are rich with jungle prints; decorative snakes slither up the stairwells and banisters outside. "You've got hitmen, FBI agents, killers, assassins. That's evident in many of the sets – little Easter eggs relaying that we are dealing with people who are murderers."

Dust Bunny is certainly full of them, from the unnamed "Intriguing Neighbor," a hitman who lives across the hall from Aurora (*Hannibal* star Mads Mikkelsen, reuniting with series

FANGO FRIEND DAVID DASTMALCHIAN IS ONE OF MANY HIT MEN POPULATING THIS PARTICULAR FAIRY TALE.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

creator Fuller), to the mysterious woman (Sigourney Weaver) pulling his strings, and the many folks out to get him (including genre darling David Dastmalchian). But at its heart, it's a story about a little girl with abandonment issues and the vibrant imagination she's cultivated to cope with them.

"We're playing with everything at this point... making things a little bit more than what they seem," Lyn says. "So, for example, just simple shots of bad guys approaching Aurora's apartment. We want to extend out the shadows... make them scary."

> "IF IT'S TOO SCARY, WE'RE GOING TO LOSE OUR AUDIENCE. IF IT'S TOO FLUFFY, WE'RE GOING TO LOSE OUR AUDIENCE. WE'VE GOT TO PLAY THAT FINE LINE."
>
> - CRAIG LYN -

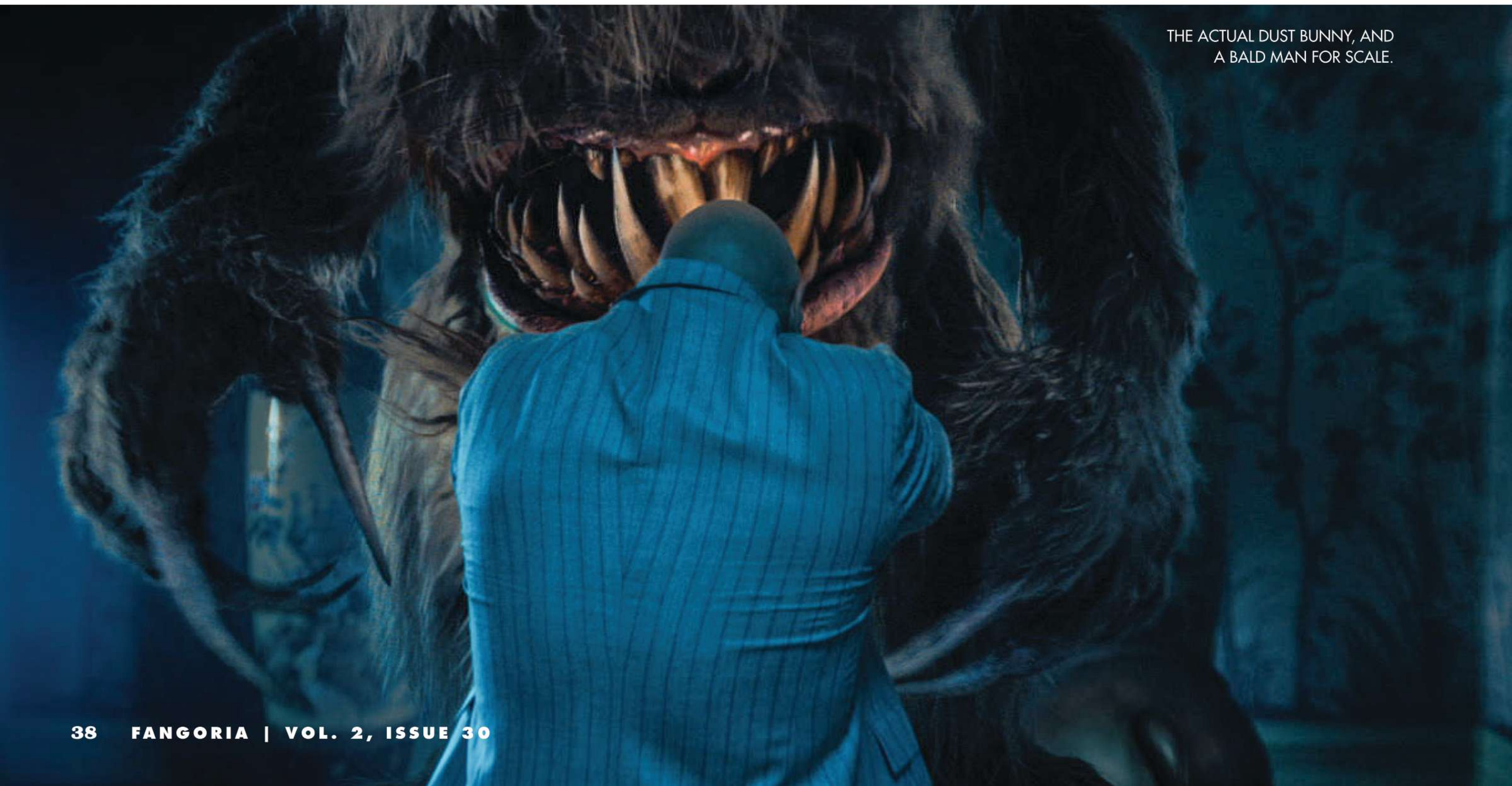
With Aurora's overactive imagination shaping the world of *Dust Bunny*, it's no wonder that her hitman neighbor is skeptical about the monster's existence. He's pretty sure her foster fam took a bullet meant for him, and now he's saddled with a liability who has not only seen his face, but won't stop pestering him to kill the creature. Aurora is certain he's the man for the job. After all, she saw him slaying a "dragon" in Chinatown. Probably. Maybe. Or it was just some dudes.

MIKKELSEN + WALLPAPER: WE LOVE A POWER CLASH!

Local artist László Bolye, who shares his work online under the name KingFreak, painted the dragon graffiti that serves as the backdrop for that fantastical early fight scene. His journey to *Dust Bunny* was "kind of like a fairytale," he tells me via a translator. Walking in Budapest's Jászai Mari Square late one night, Bolye saw a man in colorful clothing exiting the tram and recognized Fuller at once. Tearing a drawing from his sketchpad, he offered it to the director as a gift – and before he knew it, he had a job.

"Bryan felt that our creative vision and the aesthetics were very similar, so he chose three of my sketches and paintings, and that is being used here," says Bolye, who later joined *Dust Bunny*'s art department and went on to be an on-set scenic painter for *Dune: Part Three*. "*Hannibal* had such a big influence on me personally," he adds. "Everything was so beautiful."

Fellow fans of Fuller's cult TV shows will find echoes of them in *Dust Bunny* – the dark humor of *Hannibal*, the whimsy of *Wonderfalls*, the eye-popping colors and patterns of *Pushing Daisies* – and yet the film is entirely its own. In fact, it's unlike anything else I've seen in recent years, a throwback to the kind of gateway horror that ruled the '80s but seems to have fallen out of fashion of late. Much like *Gremlins* and *Poltergeist* before it, *Dust Bunny* is likely to welcome a whole new generation of genre fans



THE ACTUAL DUST BUNNY, AND A BALD MAN FOR SCALE.

SLOAN STEALS EVERY SCENE, AND OUR HEARTS TO BOOT.

and future FANGORIA readers into the fold. There's still room for scares – who didn't shit themselves just a little bit watching *Poltergeist* as a child? – but not the kind that turn you off for life.

"If it's too scary, we're going to lose our audience," Lyn acknowledges. "If it's too fluffy, we're going to lose our audience. We've got to play that fine line."

Costume designer Olivier Bériot puts it a little differently. "It's delicious and super violent," he says.

As far as Aurora can see, the threat is anything but child-friendly. From a tent just beyond the set walls, I stare, transfixed, at my monitor as Sloan rides a hippo-shaped ottoman like a gondola down the hallway, using a hobby horse as an oar. The monster can move beneath the floorboards, so Aurora's not taking any chances. Dressed in a safari-inspired outfit, she looks like she's traversing a treacherous river.

"We keep something of the child on her," Bériot says of Aurora's costumes. This is true even after Mommy eats it and Aurora starts pilfering pieces from her wardrobe. She's being forced to grow up fast, but she hasn't lost her sense of fun, wearing her watermelon skirt to tea and sticking flowers in her socks. "We don't have a little adult."

Bériot walks me through the extensive mood board he created ahead of his first meeting with Fuller, pointing out fanciful details like an assassin whose get-up blends in with the wallpaper. "All these moments are very clear in the mind of Bryan," he says. "When you read the script, you have a lot to imagine. It's why you can do a thing like this without talking with him before."

The exception is the neighbor's wardrobe, which took a little longer to come together. Fuller and Bériot eventually landed on a look that leans heavily into eye-catching tracksuits and matching sets, often textured with elaborate embroidery. The outfit we first see him fight in, from designer Wales Bonner, was plucked directly from Fuller's own wardrobe, its bright orange serving as an homage to Bruce Lee's iconic yellow jumpsuit from *Game of Death*. "It's quite sexy," Bériot says, "and you could fight with it."

I spot Mikkelsen wearing a variety of these assassin-chic outfits over the course of my visit, occasionally with a smear of blood down his face – a souvenir from the monster, perhaps, or just a hazard of the hitman lifestyle. After three years of three-piece suits on *Hannibal*, it must be a relief to wear something he can slouch in, especially considering that he's in almost every scene.

I watch him absentmindedly air-guitaring while the crew sets up the next shot, an incongruous move from the man many know as Hannibal Lecter. "I have *so* many thoughts," he announces after the first take, huddling with Fuller and co-star Sheila Atim to discuss adjustments – an exaggerated leg movement here, a playful reaction shot there. Later, as he perches on a sink in the candyfloss-pink bathroom, having clearly gotten Aurora's memo about not touching the floor, he offers to let Atim use his head for balance as she walks along a vanity cabinet in heels, a small detail that makes it into the final cut.

Mikkelsen and Fuller clearly have a strong working relationship after *Hannibal*, with Fuller writing the neighbor role specifically for the actor, but this kind of collaboration is a common theme across all my conversations with the crew.

"This is where real filmmaking is, because you're driven by much harder constraints – it forces you to be scrappy and smart," Lyn says of the independent production. "But at the same time, it's a much more enjoyable experience because you're actually part of the creative process. Everyone is, down to the cameramen,

A PRELIMINARY DESIGN SKETCH BY JONATHAN WAYSHAK.

the cinematographers, the stunt guys... Everyone has been really great about not just coming up with ideas, but the most important thing is being comfortable enough to actually say, 'Hey, what do you think about this?'"

Lyn has collaborated especially closely with the team from Legacy Effects, the Oscar-nominated FX studio that designed and operates the titular creature. I've waited this long to talk about it because, much like with the shark in *Jaws*, *Dust Bunny* is going to make you wait for it. Trust me, it's worth every second.

Even without its huge, floppy ears attached, the bunny towers over me. Its whiskers are as long as my forearms, its eyes hidden beneath a mound of hair that makes it look like a particularly ill-tempered Highland cow. It's wearing rubber stunt dentures when I thrust my head into its gaping maw, no doubt preparing to swallow the next actor, but its real teeth rest innocently nearby, sharp enough to pierce cardboard. Maybe even skin.

"Bryan, when he had us design the rabbit, was interested in it being as big as possible," says Legacy's Mike Manzel. "We showed [the mock-up] to him and he's like, 'Oh, that's great, but could it be bigger?' It was already eight feet tall!"

It takes six people to operate the bunny in all its glory – Manzel, Cary Gunnar Lee, and Lon Muckey from Legacy, and three local puppeteers. One person is the designated nose-twitcher. Another is in charge of wiggling the creature's ears.

"He's got lip movements," enthuses Lee. "His brows can fluctuate a little bit, and his nostrils can flare like he's really sniffing around."

While you wouldn't know it from the stunning sets and star-studded cast, *Dust Bunny* is a relatively low-budget film, which forced Legacy and Lyn to think strategically about the balance between VFX and puppetry. "Anytime we realistically thought we could take over, we would film test footage and then show it to Bryan," Manzel says. "Craig was just very practical, being like, 'I want to use it when we can, but we have to be realistic and not use it when it doesn't make sense to, or we're spending all day trying to figure out how to make it work.'"

Lyn says many of the film's best moments were born from this strategic collaboration. In one scene, the bunny slyly closes the door with its claw before savaging its prey – a real claw from Legacy, with the shifting floorboards around it added in later by Lyn. In another, the creature swings Aurora's bed around the room on its back, knocking over everything in its path.

"This was something that Bryan came up with, and I was going, 'Bryan, what the hell are you doing, man? You're killing me!'" Lyn recalls with a chuckle. "What we did is, we got the puppeteers to make a bunny tail and attach it to the base of the bed... To this day, that's my favorite moment of just going, 'God, this is really goofy and funny,' and it made me laugh. And it made Bryan laugh, so it means that the shot worked."

Moments like this are what give *Dust Bunny* its utterly unique charm, and I suspect that audiences of all ages are going to fall in love with the cotton-tailed horror under Aurora's bed. When you do, rest assured that the puppet is in good hands.

"He'll probably end up in Bryan's living room," Manzel says, gesturing back at the enormous box the bunny arrived in. "We'll make sure we punch some air holes in there." 💀

PUPPETEERS CARY GUNNAR LEE (LEFT) AND MIKE MANZEL (RIGHT) INTRODUCE THE AUTHOR AND FELLOW SET VISITOR ROTEM RUSAK TO THE TITLE HARE.

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INSIDE SEND HELP

SAM RAIMI'S DARKLY FUNNY SURVIVAL HORROR.

BY ISAAC FELDBERG

THERE ARE WORSE FATES THAN BEING STRANDED ON A DESERTED ISLAND, BUT FEW AS UNBEARABLE AS SHARING IT WITH A COWORKER YOU CAN'T STAND.

That's the diabolical hook for Sam Raimi's *Send Help*, a survival thriller that – true to the *Evil Dead* director's tradition of blending horror and comedy – pays off its nightmare-scenario setup with a series of exhilarating, wickedly funny, escalatingly bloody punchlines.

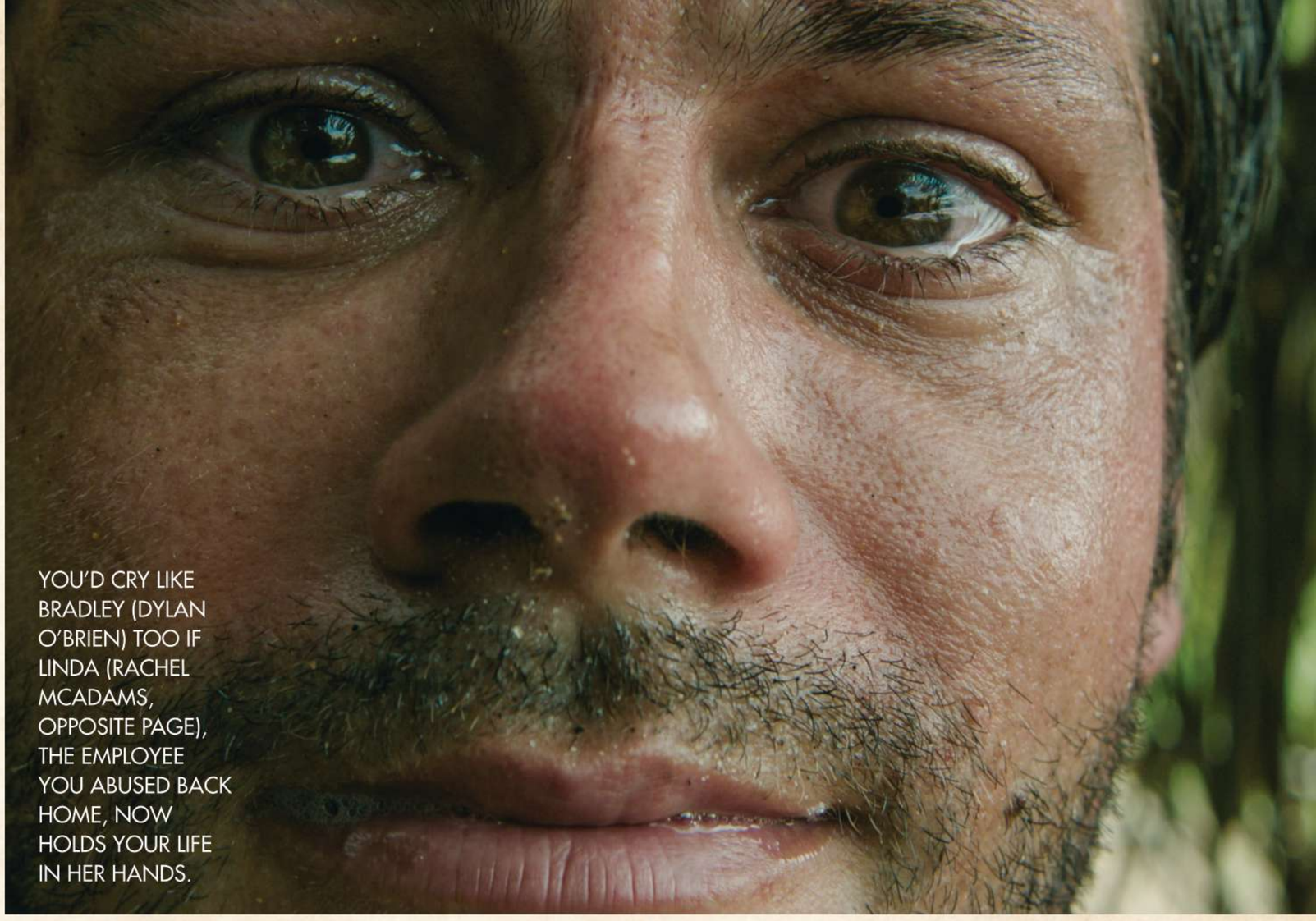
Rachel McAdams and Dylan O'Brien star as Linda Liddle and Bradley Preston, colleagues who become sole survivors of a horrifying plane crash while on a business trip. Washed ashore and forced, despite their mutual distaste, to work together to survive, they instead struggle to bury the hatchet – that is, without literally burying it in each other's skulls.

Back at the office, after taking over for his CEO father, Bradley had been dismissive of Linda, cruelly handing his fraternity brother the promotion she'd earned. Early into their ill-fated flight to Bangkok, he even goes out of his way to ridicule Linda, playing her contestant audition tape for *Survivor* – her favorite program – aloud for the amusement of others.

Linda is the "most capable, hardworking, and overlooked member of her consulting firm's strategy and planning team," Raimi tells FANGORIA. "She's somebody who's stuck at the bottom of the rung, who truly deserves recognition – but because she's a woman and slightly older, she doesn't get it and is in fact actively denied it through unfair office maneuvering."

Island life upends the power dynamic. Recovering from his injuries, a semi-conscious Bradley depends on Linda, who showcases impressive survival skills by administering first aid, building shelter, collecting rainwater, and foraging for food. "When you erase their job titles, her talent rises to the surface; her abilities *prove* she deserved recognition," Raimi says. "There she blossoms, on the island, stripped of all the men holding her back from advancement."

Produced by Raimi and Zainab Azizi, his creative partner at Raimi Productions, *Send Help* was written by Damian Shannon and Mark Swift (2009's *Friday the 13th* remake, *Freddy vs. Jason*). Azizi met the duo first and fell for their protagonist. "Everyone's felt like Linda at least once in their lives," she says. "There's such wish fulfillment to this: what would you do if you were stranded on a deserted island with your horrible boss?" She arranged a meeting with Raimi, who was similarly taken by the treatment.



YOU'D CRY LIKE BRADLEY (DYLAN O'BRIEN) TOO IF LINDA (RACHEL MCADAMS, OPPOSITE PAGE), THE EMPLOYEE YOU ABUSED BACK HOME, NOW HOLDS YOUR LIFE IN HER HANDS.

"It was original, with exciting twists, surprising endings, and great character revelations," he enthuses. "Isolation is a classic element, not only in horror films but also character dramas. When you get people alone, whether it's two main characters in the desert, on an island, or even trapped underground in the middle of an earthquake, it sets the stage for great personal interaction and discovery by different characters of who each other are – and that's, as these writers recognized, a very fun, exciting adventure."

Raimi and Azizi further developed Linda, but they knew they needed a perfect lead to bring her off the page, someone charismatic yet fearless enough to power the story into dark, unsettling territory. Raimi had just the person in mind: Oscar-nominated actress Rachel McAdams, who'd worked with him on *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. Neither Raimi nor Azizi dared dream that McAdams would decisively seize the opportunity. When she did, they were doubly convinced nobody else could have played Linda.

"I absolutely love an adventure," McAdams tells FANGORIA. "Going outside my comfort zone, traveling to far-off lands, picking up new skills, and finding both emotionally and physically juicy roles – this script had all of that and more."

She adds, "I was also excited to work with Sam again. He has such a kind and collaborative spirit."

STRANDED ON AN ISLAND, LINDA IS THRUST INTO THE ROLE OF CARETAKER FOR HER WOUNDED BOSS.

PHOTOS BY BROOK RUSHTON COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

LINDA FINDS SURVIVAL MODE SUITS HER – EVEN IF IT GETS OCCASIONALLY MESSY (BELOW).

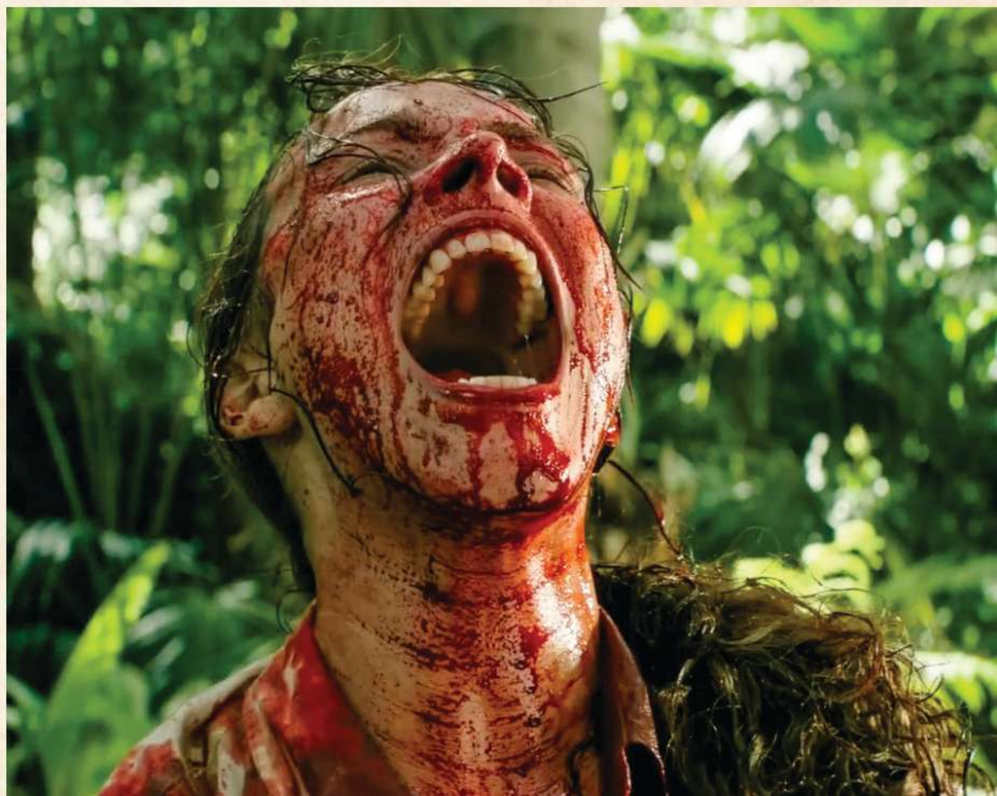
McAdams worked to flesh out the character, considering everything from what Linda's cubicle would look like to how she'd dress and what would make Bradley her ideal nemesis. "Rachel is an all-purpose actress; she worked with all the department heads to find these expressions of character," Raimi recalls. "Pre-production was a process of a million discoveries: taking her through storyboards, showing her how I would like to do every single shot and explaining why we'd do those shots, gathering her feedback on whether it all rang true to her."

Linda's obsessed with *Survivor* – but that series has always been a social experiment, its island setting a crucible for interpersonal drama. More to McAdams' taste is survival programming that emphasizes the nature part. "One of my favorite shows ever is the survival series *Alone*," she shares. "Even as a kid, I used to spend way too many hours fantasizing about getting lost in the woods and having to 'go it alone.'" (The History Channel series, featuring contestants who spend up to a hundred days enduring wilderness in punishing solitude, carrying only camera equipment and limited survival items, is closer to Werner Herzog's ruminations on nature's power than one of *Survivor*'s hardcore relatives.)

It might shock viewers who still know McAdams best for her three early breakout roles – *Mean Girls*, *The Notebook* and *Wedding Crashers* – to see her sparring for survival. "Rachel has always been Hollywood's sweetheart, so it was so exciting for us to see her take on this darker role," Azizi reflects. "She completely transformed."

McAdams has played intense, gritty parts before – a woman terrorized by a stranger on an airplane in Wes Craven's *Red Eye*, a tough-as-nails cop in the second season of *True Detective* – but *Send Help* challenged her in unprecedented ways. Physically training for months, McAdams worked with Ky Furneaux, an Australian outdoor guide and stunt person who served as the film's resident survivalist. "I got to spend invaluable time with one of the most impressive women I've ever met,"

"THE PHYSICAL STRAIN ALONE WAS VERY INTENSE - NOT TO MENTION THE BUCKETS OF BLOOD AND SNOT I WOUND UP WEARING. BUT IT WAS ALSO INCREDIBLY CATHARTIC." -RACHEL McADAMS



the actress recounts. "She taught me to make fire, use a knife, collect water, spear a fish – the list goes on and on. She is a true wonder of a human."

As McAdams tested her mettle on set, Azizi focused on keeping her cool; besides dehydration risks in Thailand, continuity was a concern. "We kept our actors out of the sun so they wouldn't tan naturally; our makeup team, led by Chiara Tripodi, was excellent with all their tanning, burning, sun blisters, mosquito bites – it was a fun game we played," Azizi recalls.

"We had to be tracking the accumulation of damage delivered by the island," Raimi adds. "She eventually becomes monstrous, all these cuts and bruises. We had to shoot elements out of order, so there was guesswork involved: how badly at this point would her head be bleeding, do we think?"

Raimi's films often inflict physical punishment on his actors; Bruce Campbell endured such absurd torrents of abuse while making *Evil Dead* movies that the director affectionately referred to his torture as "Ash-bashing." Alison Lohman similarly suffered for her art in Raimi's *Drag Me to Hell*; caked in mud, blood, and other demonic fluids, she spent a memorable scene screaming as a puppet spewed live maggots, worms, and slime into her open mouth.

Though Raimi has his own fake-blood recipe (half a bottle of Karo corn syrup, a full bottle of red food coloring, a few drops of blue food coloring, plus instant coffee), he turned to makeup and mechanical effects for *Send Help*'s arterial sprays: "I needed something, in this case, that I could hit the actors in the eye with, that wouldn't damage their skin, that they could swallow – because I told them, they're going to end up swallowing a lot of it."

McAdams leaned into Raimi's splatstick for a scene where, in need of protein, Linda fashions a spear and hunts a wild boar through the undergrowth. "I'm not going to lie: the boar scene was tough, and I was a bit grouchy those days, questioning my choice of career," McAdams recalls, laughing.

"Keeping up being in that kind of peril, and the physical strain alone, was very intense – not to mention the buckets of blood and snot I wound up wearing. But it was also incredibly cathartic, particularly for the character. I think this is a turning point for Linda in the movie: eat or be eaten. And, subconsciously, she's working out a lot of pent-up angst."

A PRACTICAL FX BOAR GETS A CLOSE-UP, AND SOON (BELOW) *WILD BOAR À LA LINDA* ENDS UP ON THE CASTAWAYS' MENU.

To craft a ferocious feral hog, they turned to Creature NFX Workshop director Paul Trefry, who created an animatronic – Azizi fondly calls it "our boar-headed machine" – for McAdams to act against. ("I kept trying to squeeze a prayer thanking the boar for its life into the end of the scene," she says. "Very *Alone*, if you've seen the show. I think Linda has a great deal of respect for the natural world.")

Raimi, Azizi, Trefry, and the puppeteers then collaborated with production designer Ian Gracie, visual effects supervisor Everett Burrell, director of photography Bill Pope, and executive producer JJ Hook to further design the beast. "I remember we were all in a room debating the size of the boar's head," Raimi says, chuckling.

In post-production, the creature's still "growing, festering, and evolving," he notes. "Now, it's about, 'Can we get more light in this eye? Can its teeth be whiter so we can see them in its dark mouth? Can the fur's texture be less fluffy like a hamster and more like a greasy rat that just came out of the sewer?'"

Send Help presented other challenges, from underwater photography to the plane-crash sequence. As in *A Simple Plan*, Raimi's thriller about small-time townspeople whose lives are destroyed after they find money in a downed plane, the crash is "a catalyst for the drama that ensues" – but having made *Oz, the*

BRADLEY AND HIS ROLEX DAYTONA CAN'T BELIEVE LINDA'S TRANSFORMATION.

Great and Powerful, Raimi couldn't help but also see the scene as "the tornado that took Dorothy someplace else," both harrowing and transformative for *Send Help*'s put-upon protagonist.

Collaborating with Gracie, Burrell, and stunt coordinators, Raimi envisioned a scene where fuselage breaking apart would trigger explosive decompression, causing Linda's coworkers to be violently blown out of the main cabin. Both slapstick and suspense are in steady supply as Linda, sensibly wearing her seatbelt, fends off frantic executives. ("Women and children first," it turns out, isn't in the company code of conduct.) As they claw to save themselves, literally hanging on by the skin of their teeth, in-flight utensils are weaponized, neckties prove deadly – and Linda is seriously unimpressed by the team.

"It was our chance to double down," Raimi explains. "The men are not only holding her down, not letting her succeed – but in times of extreme trouble, they're literally trying to take her life from her so they can live."

For her part, "I think Linda would be a really good person if she hadn't run into so many bad apples," says McAdams – "but it wasn't great for suspense."

At Raimi Productions, which he co-founded as Renaissance Pictures mid-production on *The Evil Dead* with Campbell and producer Rob Tapert, as well as Ghost House Pictures, which he and Tapert co-founded in 2002, Raimi focuses on mentoring young filmmakers. Now in his sixties, he often works with power players whose upward trajectories he witnessed firsthand.

Early in his career as an associate producer at Marvel, Kevin Feige worked with then-studio head Avi Arad on Raimi's *Spider-Man* movies, making for a full-circle moment fifteen years later when Feige, serving as president of Marvel Studios, hired Raimi to direct *Doctor Strange 2*. ("Thank goodness I was nice to the kid!") *Send Help* reunited Raimi with J.R. Young, his director's assistant on *Spider-Man 2* who later led Ghost House before joining 20th Century Fox. "Now, at 20th Century Studios, he's my boss," Raimi exclaims. "Fortunately, he's been so kind to me, and supportive of this picture, that it's shocking."

Azizi started her career in the WME mailroom before becoming a coordinator; after meeting Raimi as he circled one of her projects, she came to co-run Raimi Productions. "One of the messages in this film that I love – and something I see Sam do as a filmmaker – is to treat everybody with respect and kindness, no matter what level of power you have," she says. "I know the movie is fantastical, bonkers, and wild, but I hope people go back to work the next day and treat their colleagues how they'd want to be treated."

Work hard, be kind, and pay it forward, agrees Raimi, flashing a mischievous grin: *"Or else!"*

SAM RAIMI OVERSEES THE MAYHEM, AS HE SHOULD.

DON'T BLOW IT

BY MEREDITH BORDERS

WHISTLE SCREENWRITER OWEN EGERTON AND DIRECTOR CORIN HARDY DISCUSS THEIR VIOLENT NEW TEEN SCREAMER, STARRING A GROUP OF MISFITS AND ONE VERY MEMORABLE AZTEC DEATH WHISTLE.

It's one thing to face your own mortality. It's another thing to *face* your own mortality.

In *Whistle*, the teenagers of Pellington High are asked to do the latter, to be physically confronted by walking, gaping avatars of their inevitable deaths. This unthinkable misery was conceived by Owen Egerton (*Mercy Black*, *Blood Fest*), adapting his own short story into a screenplay directed by Corin Hardy (*The Hallow*, *The Nun*).

Whistle introduces viewers to Chrys (Dafne Keen), who has just moved to a small factory town after enduring more than her fair share of personal trauma. Chrys is now living with her cousin Rel (Sky Yang) and, though anti-social, she folds easily into Rel's oddball friend group: Dean (Jhaleil Swaby), Grace (Ali Skovbye), and Ellie (Sophie Nélisse), for whom Chrys is carrying a serious torch. After discovering a disturbing, skull-shaped artifact in Chrys' locker, the kids learn from their teacher Mr. Craven (Nick Frost, excellent here as ever) that it's an ancient Aztec death whistle. As teenagers will do with even priceless artifacts, Chrys brings the whistle to a pool party, where Grace carelessly blows it. The haunting shriek emanating from the whistle worms its way into the kids' ears, and suddenly they're being stalked by visions of their own deaths. Much worse: the visions soon become a gruesome reality.

"It's *terrifying*, Meredith," Egerton says of a video he found of an archeologist blowing a real-life Aztec death whistle, an instrument – possibly ceremonial, possibly tactical – discovered in temple ruins in modern-day Mexico City. The sound it makes "is the kind of scream that takes your spine and squeezes it with cold hands."

"I saw the same video. Actually, you can go on YouTube," Hardy says, a challenge in his voice, "and it's almost

YOU KNOW HOW TO WHISTLE, DON'T YOU? JUST PUT YOUR LIPS TOGETHER AND NOOOOOOO...

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL GIBSON COURTESY OF SHUDDER & IFC FILMS

HANG ON! TO, UH, YOUR OWN ENTRAILS? L-R: DAFNÉ KEEN (CHRYS), SOPHIE NÉLISSE (ELLIE) AND ALI SKOVBYE (GRACE).

like a test, a bit like *The Ring*. 'Do you really want to listen to this sound?' It's almost like a dare to hear it."

Later, I take the dare. The video is chilling; it's, as Egerton says, spine-squeezing. It sounds like unearthly wind, like violent screams. It sounds like the whistle in *Whistle*, because let me tell you, the sound design department *nailed it*.

"Garret Farrell and Steve Fanagan worked for hours because, ultimately, it's like any good performance," Hardy says of the whistle's din. "If this thing does what we see it do, it's thousands and thousands of years old; it's likely that it's claimed thousands and thousands of lives, and changed hands many, many times," he continues. "Each time you hear it, and your death comes for you, it claims your soul. So this should sound like the sound of thousands and thousands of different cultures, and screams, and people, humans who have effectively been hunted down by the death whistle."

He shrugs, completing his thought: "So, that was the easy task of translating what that sounded like."

Technically, that entailed recording various screams from all the different actors, layered together, some with backwards playback, processed through various translations and "a lot of different creative sounds." It is, in a word, dreadful.

But hey, forget the difficulty of communicating the noise made by immeasurable souls crying out in agony – Hardy and Egerton also had to craft characters interesting and relatable enough that we actually care if they're killed by their own deaths. Luckily, the central romance between Chrys and Ellie works beautifully, a lighthouse beam cutting its way through the treacherous dark.

"One of the things I love about horror, and I know Corin and I have this in common, is we love the kind

DEAN (JHALEIL SWABY) FEELS THE MEATY HAND OF DEATH UPON HIM.

DIRECTOR CORIN HARDY WITH A HAUNTING VISAGE OF DEATH DRESSED AS A SEXY DEVIL FOR HALLOWEEN.

PHOTO COURTESY OWEN EGERTON

SCREENWRITER OWEN EGERTON GOT TO DROP BY THE FILM'S HARVEST FESTIVAL AND SLING SOME 'CORN.

of horror movie that has as much life in it as it does death," Egerton says. "That there are characters who are discovering themselves, who are experiencing life, not just being chased. And for both of these characters, that is definitely their story."

After someone recently asked him if he was making a point by writing Ellie and Chrys as gay, Egerton replied, "Well, when a character tells you that they're queer, you listen to them. You don't tell them, 'No, that doesn't fit into the story I'm telling,' or 'No, I'm not trying to do that in this world.' When a character tells you they're queer, it's just like when a friend or a sibling or your kid tells you they're queer. You listen, and you embrace, and you celebrate, and you tell them how fucking proud of them you are."

And Chrys and Ellie are surrounded by a friend group that's damn near as engaging, and as well-realized. Hardy says he liked how Egerton's script "played with this idea of the American high school types. And then throughout the journey of the horror, subverted them in ways where they don't all turn out necessarily how you thought."

Hardy dubbed the ensemble The Breakfast Club, and in addition to the movie that inspired the nickname, called out *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Lost Boys*, *Fright Night* and *Donnie Darko* as influences. To get The Breakfast Club to relax into their roles and into the larger group dynamic, Hardy organized an escape room outing, in which each actor participated as their characters. It was "a very successful process," he says. "So when we hit the ground running and started non-chronologically filming, they were already in their characters and established relationships."

And by "hit the ground running," one presumes Hardy means "take these lovely, complicated teens, and put them through some of the most heinous supernatural violence imaginable." Because wow, the deaths in *Whistle*? They're savage.

"My childhood was wanting to do special effects and make monsters," Hardy says. "I'm always attracted to visual opportunities to create heightened and crazy monsters or set pieces." For the truly demented kills in *Whistle*, Hardy worked with prosthetics makeup designers Steve Newburn and Paul Jones, "two of the best out there" for the practical work, as well as "the genius minds at Herne Hill VFX," who recently came off del Toro's *Frankenstein*.

"So, as well as all the emotional, grounded, heartfelt horror, there was also the other side that I love and I think the audiences loved, which is like, 'How are they going to die? Can they cheat it? Can they beat it? And if they can't, what's that going to look like?'"

It's going to look sadistic. Inhumane. Ingenious. Really, *really* good. As Hardy says, "I can get my teeth stuck into these deaths. And I want them to be as beautiful, and sensational, and outrageous as possible within the narrative of the story. But they're all meaningful, because if you read into [each death], there is a little story of how they got to be there."

And that's the ultimate story, right? How we get to our deaths? "When I was writing," Egerton says, "I was exploring not just the question of what will other people find scary, but specifically what do I find scary. And what I find scary is the fact that I'm going to die. That scares me and fascinates me."

But there's a reverse side to that, too, elegantly signified in *Whistle*. Hardy explains that the concept of *memento mori* is apt here because it indicates a collection of objects that represent death – much like the whistle. But the Latin phrase also means "remember you must die." While that might sound like a bummer, Hardy says, "If you flip it, it's actually a really positive message, if we remember it. Because as Chrys says, 'when you're born, so is your death.' And so, live your life to the fullest."

Because either way, death's going to find you. 💀

DON'T FEAR THE REAPER, BUT DEFINITELY FEAR THIS DUDE.

JAMES (JEREMY IRVINE) SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO BE MESSING WITH MIRRORS IN A HORROR MOVIE.

CHRISTOPHE GANS RETURNS TO SILENT HILL

BY BRANDON WAINERDI

20 YEARS LATER, THE DIRECTOR OF THE 2006 FILM REVISITS THE NIGHTMARE.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS IS, BUT WE KNOW WE DO NOT LIKE IT.

Christophe Gans knew he wanted to make a *Silent Hill* movie long before Hollywood had any idea what *Silent Hill* even was. "At the time, it was impossible to actually contact Konami, the Japanese company who produced *Silent Hill*," Gans recounted in a remote interview from Paris, France. "I shot a video of myself explaining why I wanted to adapt it and how I was going to do it. I put Japanese subtitles on it and sent it to Tokyo. Months passed and then one day I received a phone call saying, 'Everybody on Konami's staff has watched your tape and it's okay – you can do it.' That's how it started."

Actually, it had started for Gans decades earlier, as a young boy in France desperate for anything *different*. "I decided to become a director at thirteen years old," said Gans. "I had just seen an amazing movie that combined two of my passions: rock music and horror. It was *Phantom of the Paradise* by Brian De Palma. I sat down at two o'clock in the afternoon and left the theater at ten o'clock at night, watching multiple screenings of the film. I came back home, completely in shock, and I said to my mother, 'I want to be a director.' *Phantom* was the beginning of everything."

From there, Gans dove into the world of film criticism, co-founding the famed genre magazine *Starfix*, through which he was able to encounter a lot of his heroes. "I became a film critic and journalist and got to meet Brian [De Palma] as well as Dario [Argento] – I was friends with them. It was great for me to go from being a fan to being a film critic and then to finally cross the line and become a director myself."

Gans' journey took him to directing several French films, including *Crying Freeman*, an adaptation of a Japanese manga. Of course, at that time, manga as a medium was relatively unheard of and untested, a major risk for any studio. "I had convinced my producer on *Crying Freeman* that manga was the future," remembered Gans. "After its release, I then went to convince him that the *next* big thing would be adapting a video game."

He was an early champion for the interactive medium in the film industry, driven by his personal passion for gaming. "My father had brought home *Pong*, but, of course, I was not very interested in that. It was not a passion until the moment – I remember it very well – I came back home for Christmas and my nephew was playing *Quake*. We played together for something like thirty hours in a row, and I said to myself, 'Wow, that's something that's going to be much stronger than cinema someday.' So I went back to Paris and got a PlayStation and the first four games I bought were *Tomb Raider*, *Resident Evil*, *Final Fantasy VII*, and *Silent Hill*."

At that time, video games were still considered an unproven property to adapt into a movie, at least in Hollywood's eyes. Yes, there had

PHOTOS BY ALEKSANDAR LETIC COURTESY OF CONVERSE & SCREAMBOX

JUST ONE OF THOSE CEILING-DWELLING ARACHNO-BEINGS, NO BIG DEAL.

been a few attempts over the years – *Super Mario Bros.* and *Street Fighter* are the obvious "standouts" here – but *Silent Hill*'s development period in 2004 was actually near the apex of a 2000s video game adaptation glut, marked by the diminishing returns of movies like *Resident Evil* and *Doom*.

Through it all, however, *Silent Hill* has remained a long-running, much-beloved horror video game franchise, using inspirations as vast as the more obvious (*Twin Peaks* and the oeuvre of John Carpenter) and the more specific (the nightmarish art of Salvador Dalí or Dante's *Inferno*). Originally released in 1999 by legendary developer Team Silent (a small collection of Japanese talent within Konami), *Silent Hill* is still part of the core gaming zeitgeist, horror or otherwise. To many, it is the greatest horror video game franchise ever created.

Gans' first attempt at adapting the foggy, monster-laden streets of *Silent Hill* finally premiered in 2006, gaining a cult following over the past two decades. With a screenplay from Roger Avary (co-writer of *Pulp Fiction*), *Silent Hill* featured stunning work from Danish cinematographer Dan Laustsen (most recently of Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*), some barbwire-induced memorable deaths, and a turn from horror icon Alice Krige. A 2012 largely-panned sequel, subtitled *Revelation*, featured the return of several cast members… but not Gans.

It was the global events of 2020 that prompted Gans to return to the fertile creative ground of *Silent Hill*. "I came back to the game because, during the [pandemic], I had nothing to do," said Gans. "I decided to write the script for *Return to Silent Hill*, this time directly adapted from *Silent Hill 2*. And at the end of it all, I called Konami and said to them: 'I am ready to go back to *Silent Hill*.'"

Konami had also been working on their own return to the haunted town of Silent Hill, or rather, their remade return. As Gans recounts, "When I told them I wanted to adapt the second game, they said, 'Oh that's interesting, because we are thinking of remaking that one!'" The remake was released for PlayStation 5 and PC in October 2024 to rousing reviews, but the production of Gans' new film and the production of the Konami reboot were surprisingly siloed. Some elements from the game's famed sequel (namely its iconic Pyramid Head monster), however, had already been present in Gans' original film – much to fans' initial outcry.

"It's actually very simple to understand," explained Gans. "In the first film, the monsters were like predators. They were a real thing you were risking to meet if you went to the town of Silent Hill. In this second one, that's absolutely *not* what they are. It's why the fans were not happy that we put Pyramid Head in the original, and they were right. Pyramid Head is

THE MONSTERS HAUNTING THE NEW FILM REMAIN TACTILE AND FLEXIBLE – A PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF JIM SUNDERLAND'S NIGHTMARES.

MARY (HANNAH EMILY ANDERSON) LEARNED THIS TRICK FROM LAURIE STRODE.

LAURA (EVIE TEMPLETON) AND HER DOLLY HAVE BEEN THROUGH IT.

a doppelganger of Jim Sunderland [the main character in both the *Silent Hill 2* game and now the *Return to Silent Hill* movie]. It is an extension of Jim and of his toxic masculinity – certainly with his big sword and everything."

This example brings up an interesting (and slightly spoilery) note: the monsters in both *Silent Hill 2* and in *Return to Silent Hill* are conjured entities, figments of Sunderland's imagination. "In this one, the monsters have much more meaning than in the first film. In *Silent Hill*, there were some surreal, strange, and beautiful monsters – the people of the silent dimension. In *Return to Silent Hill*, they are directly reflecting the mental issues and problems of the main character."

But video games have changed rather dramatically in the past twenty years – has Gans' filmmaking approach? "In the first film, I was completely focused on the building of the world of Silent Hill," said Gans, "It was so complex. Originally, I wanted to adapt the second game for that film – it has always been my favorite. The second game is very special because it has this *Twilight-Zone*-esque concept, this idea that everything is seen through the eyes of a mad man. But we realize in the second game that the main character has created Silent Hill to torture himself. Basically, he has created his own path to hell."

In order to make this path to hell as believable as possible, Gans was a loud proponent of practical effects and monster makeup, a personal requisite that dates all the way back to 2004. "Originally, when I did the first film, I had proposed to the producers to do the monsters with acrobats and dancers and contortionists. They were very happy because it was less expensive than trying to accomplish it with computer-generated effects. In the new one I did the same thing, but the producers were not happy at all. They wanted to do everything with computer-generated effects because, for them, it was now less expensive! But I didn't like that. I think it's much more comfortable to be on set with the actors who are actually playing with the monster."

With new and adapted creatures designed by Patrick Tatopoulos (most recently the production designer for Zack Snyder's DC superhero films), the monsters haunting the new film remain tactile and flexible – a physical manifestation of Jim Sunderland's nightmares. "It actually all comes from my passion for action films, especially action films from Hong Kong," explained Gans. "The last frontier is actually the human body, and what the human body can achieve on the screen. I'm a big fan of Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, as well as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li. I like when somebody can do something amazing on screen with his body, and you *feel* it. It's part of the wonder of cinema."

He continued: "People like to do everything through CG, and can achieve beautiful results with it, but I also have the feeling that audiences will feel like they're lacking something. That's the big problem for me, with both CG and AI – that people, in one moment, will stop believing in the image. They will just begin thinking, 'Oh, this has been done by a computer, right?' This is my own way to slow that process – by working with people and dancers and artists and choreographers."

It has been twenty years, but Gans has never been more enthusiastic about *Silent Hill*. And now his triumphant return is heralded by the things he still holds dear: practical effects, personal monsters, and scary stories from Silent Hill that can only be told through both the big and small screens.

Return to Silent Hill *releases on January 23, 2026, through Cineverse.* 💀

OFRENDAS ARE KINDA WEIRD IN THE WORLD OF *SILENT HILL*.

WOULD WE EVEN HAVE HORROR MOVIES IF PEOPLE HEEDED SIGNS?

THE BRIDE! She

By BJ Colangelo

MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL AND JESSIE BUCKLEY UNLEASH THEIR MAD SCIENCE EXPERIMENT.

It started with a tattoo of The Bride of Frankenstein. The epochal image of Elsa Lanchester's conical hair with lightning-trace streaks on both sides, permanently inked in the flesh of a man, caught the eye of Maggie Gyllenhaal and inspired her to watch James Whale's classic Universal Monster movie. "The thing is, in the movie, she doesn't speak at all," Gyllenhaal says. "But she's amazing. That woman is all these things that I then tried to put in our movie – disobedient, ungovernable, all the words she says. Even though [Elsa's Bride] doesn't get to speak, you can tell she's formidable."

"FRANK" (CHRISTIAN BALE) GOES TO SOME DARK PLACES FOR COMPANIONSHIP, AND IS ABOUT TO GET *SO* MUCH MORE THAN HE BARGAINED FOR: JESSIE BUCKLEY AS THE BRIDE.

The bride in *Bride of Frankenstein* has less than ten minutes of screen time, but has been idolized, commodified, and merchandised for nearly a century. But that's no fault of Frankenstein's first creation, a character that Gyllenhaal finds deeply empathetic. "He's so smart, he's so loving, and he's so fucking lonely," she tells me. "He's like, 'Just give me someone to be with,' and that's a reasonable thing to ask for, and that most of us can relate to, and then at the same time, there's something sort of fucked up about that." It was this ethical conundrum – both validating the pain of Frankenstein's Monster and his lonesome existence and, at the same time, imagining the distressing reality of what it would actually mean to give the Monster a Bride – that Gyllenhaal couldn't stop thinking about. "How could I take this puzzle, which fundamentally has a problem inside it, and make it really be about this woman, and make her a force that absolutely must be reckoned with?"

The Bride! tells the story of what happens when a groundbreaking scientist named Dr. Euphronious (Annette Bening) brings a murdered young woman back to life (Jessie Buckley) after Frankenstein's Monster (Christian Bale) begs her to give him a companion. Gyllenhaal's initial instinct was to set the film in the 19th century, a time when Americans were deeply invested in the spiritualism movement, and mediums – almost always women – would communicate with the dead and serve as the bridge between the mortal world and the afterlife. But she kept coming back to the 1930s, when Whale's *Frankenstein* films were released, and an era in which people flocked to the movies to escape the horrors of the world and gave themselves over to the power of cinema.

Gyllenhaal's vision became 1936 by way of early '80s punk in New York City, filtered through the vibrancy of today – the perfect outlet for her to explore the grotesque inside of us all, the truly terrifying things that we are all capable of, but know better than to ever let anyone see. "If we're honest, there are aspects of monstrousness in

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

all of us, I mean, *really* monstrous. I mean the shit you run from your whole life," she says. "And what happens if you don't run? What if you are brave enough now and then to turn around and shake hands with that monster?"

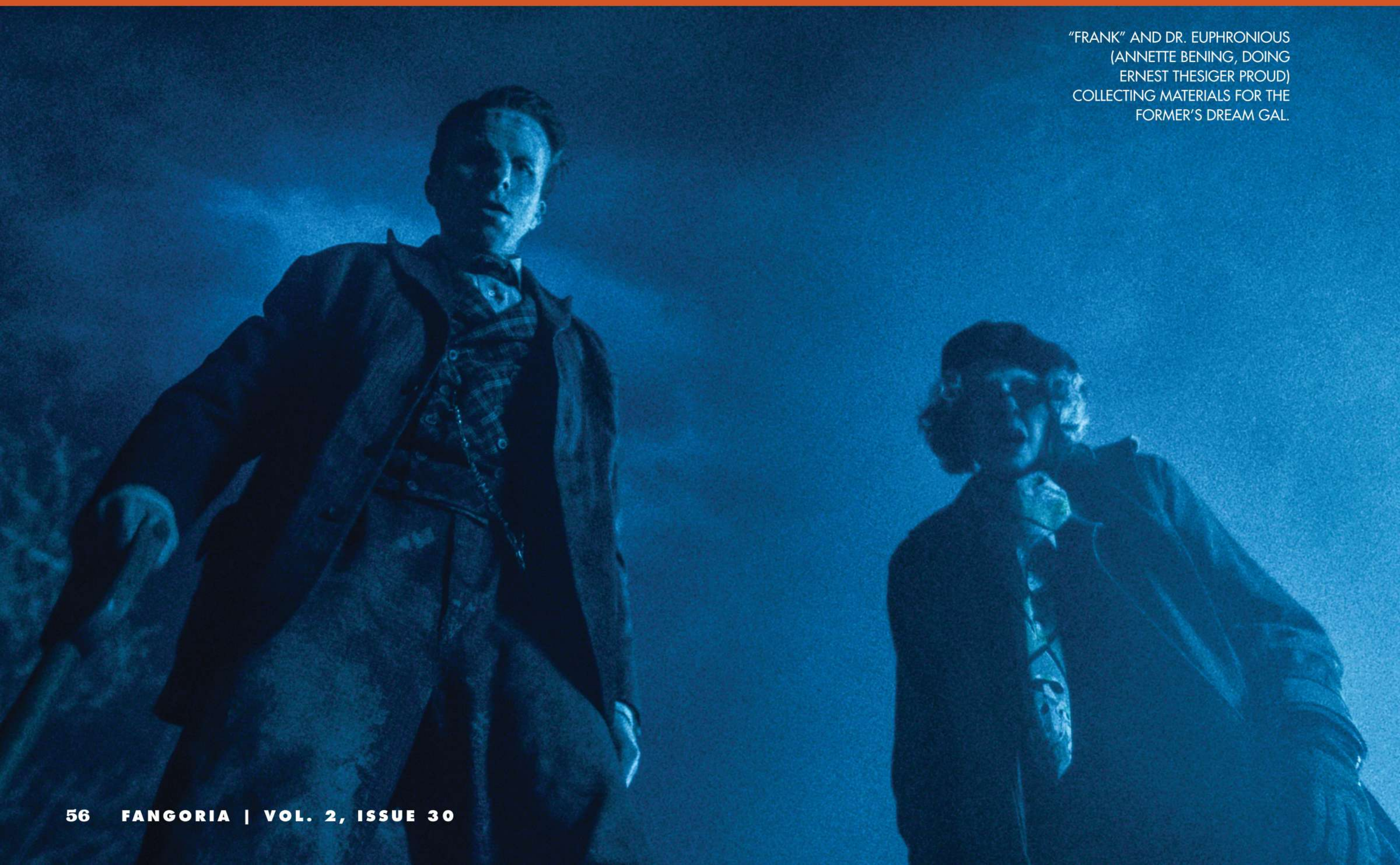
Frankensteinian stories have been having a resurgence as of late, with Yorgos Lanthimos' *Poor Things*, Grace Glowicki's *Dead Lover* (*see page 59*), Zelda Williams' *Lisa Frankenstein*, and Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* – just to name a few – all exploring pertinent themes and generating cult-like followings in the process. *The Bride!* builds off the familiarity we all have with Mary Shelley's story of creation and loneliness (as well as its subsequent film adaptations), less interested in scrutinizing the hubris of The Creator and moreso presenting the mess that now must be cleaned up. "You have the mythology. You know about Frankenstein," Gyllenhaal says. "I think what happens by setting it 100 years later is that the degree and the depth of his loneliness is just massively bigger." Gyllenhaal and Bale used to say that at the start of *The Bride!*, we're seeing the Monster take a massive risk by asking Dr. Euphronious to make him a companion, with his fate entirely dependent on whether or not she can. "He didn't think he could survive it, and I think many people know that feeling," she says. *The Bride!* also utilizes the time period to justify motivation for Euphronious beyond the ability to resurrect a dead person.

"You see Annette Bening playing this fucking brilliant woman, and I think her work has been too wild, too iconoclastic, too outside the box... I think she's been pretty much shut down," Gyllenhaal says. "People are scared of things that are new, and I think Euphronious' life has been really impacted by that." So when the erudite scientist is approached by someone who encourages her questionable work, it's difficult to decline the offer, even if she knows it's medically, ethically, and socially horrific.

"It's fucked up that she does this, and she knows it," Gyllenhaal explains. "I'm not moralizing about it, but I think she does it because she's starving for connection. She's starving to have her intellectual and scientific life lit up again. She's literally starving, too. So

PENELOPE CRUZ IS MYRNA, A DETECTIVE ON THE TRAIL OF THE BRIDE AND HER BEAU.

"My movie is about a woman who was being shoved into a box and explodes that box 100 times over." **-MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL**



"FRANK" AND DR. EUPHRONIOUS (ANNETTE BENING, DOING ERNEST THESIGER PROUD) COLLECTING MATERIALS FOR THE FORMER'S DREAM GAL.

a starving Frankenstein meets starving Euphronious, and they say, 'Let's do it.'"

Most *Frankenstein* stories are overwhelmingly concerned with the plight of the Doctor, centering on the hunger to create life as the crux of the journey. That is not what *The Bride!* is trying to accomplish. "I can't speak to the 'Oh, we're playing God, AI, blah, blah, blah' narrative, because that's not what my movie's about," Gyllenhaal says. "My movie is about a woman who was being shoved into a box and explodes that box 100 times over."

The woman to burn it all down is the incomparable Jessie Buckley. "I mean that primal scream that the original Bride has, it's so full. Who knows what that scream is full of?" Buckley posits. "Maybe it's full of frustration. Maybe she's so desperate to talk. She was born almost as a product, without any autonomy in herself, and I think Maggie was curious how you can be in relation to anything, if someone doesn't want to be in relation to who you truly, fully are."

Gyllenhaal wrote the script without anyone specific in mind for any of the characters in her sprawling, captivating story, but when the script was finished, she knew her Bride had to be Buckley. "I really thought, truly, I don't know anyone else who could have done it," she tells me. And luckily for us all, Buckley agreed.

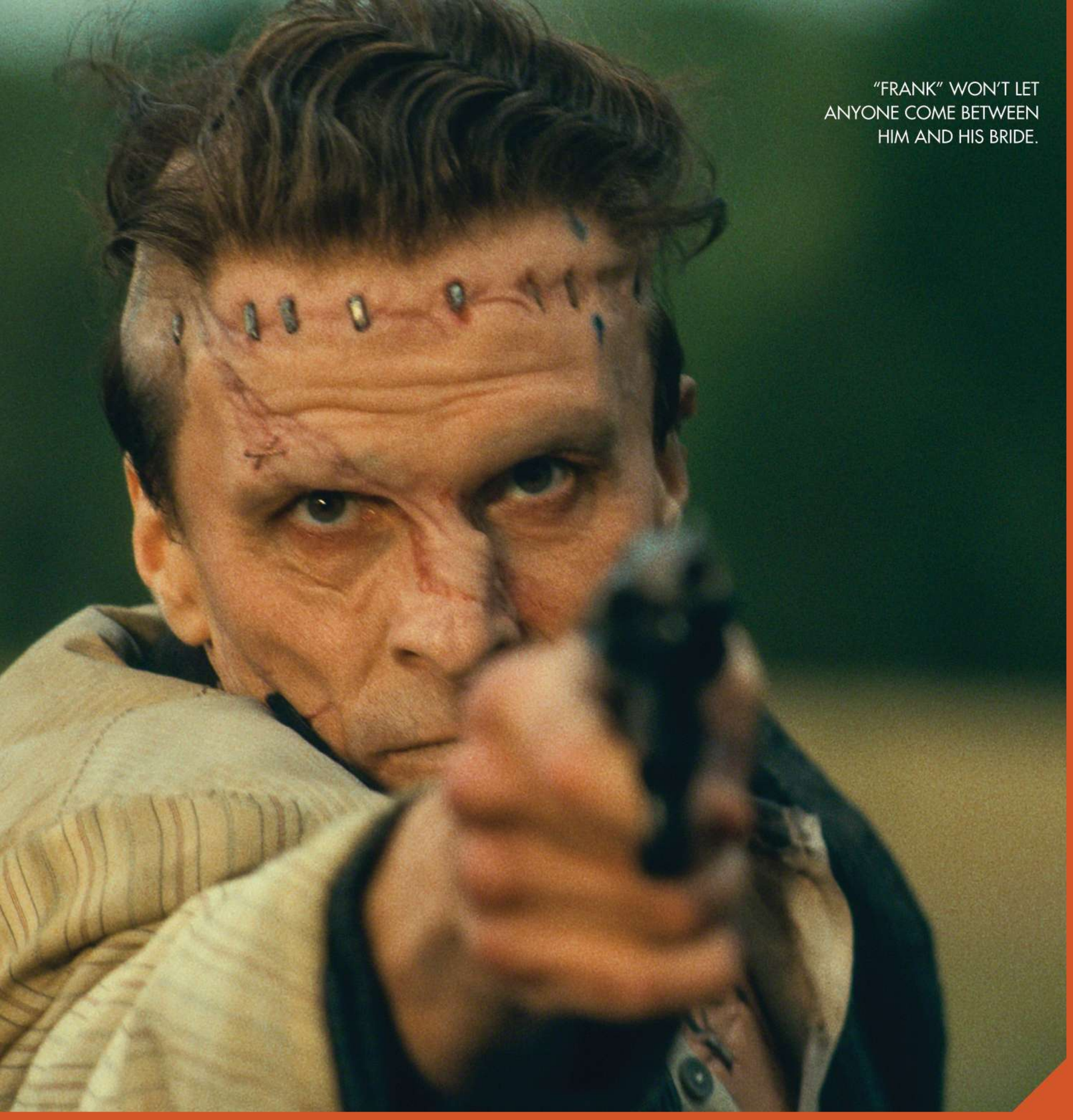
Buckley tells me she "wants to become friends with [her] shadows," and that *The Bride!* gives us all the chance to investigate what is monstrous, what is deemed monstrous, and how we incubate the monstrosities of ourselves so that we can be in a more alive relationship with each other. "The whole story of *Frankenstein* is that the monster is too much, that the creator locks him away, and it's so lonely when you lock that part of yourself off… it becomes so lonely that it can only wreak revenge on the world," Buckley says. "And I like that. It's nice and juicy."

Gyllenhaal and Buckley previously worked together on the former's feature directorial debut, *The Lost Daughter*, which earned them both Oscar nominations – Best Adapted Screenplay for Gyllenhaal, and Best Supporting Actress for Buckley. The psychological drama viciously dispels the romanticism thrust upon the

PHOTO (RIGHT) BY NIKO TAVERNISE

"FRANK" AND THE BRIDE TAKE THE TOWN BY STORM.

DIRECTOR MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL (LEFT) AND BUCKLEY AT WORK IN THE LAB.



"FRANK" WON'T LET ANYONE COME BETWEEN HIM AND HIS BRIDE.

concept of "motherhood," and serves as a beautiful preview of the style of complicated, radical, and undaunted creativity found in their second collaborative venture.

Even the look of The Bride, with her electric, violet-white hair and black ink-stained mouth, was a design choice between the duo and Oscar-winning make-up artist Nadia Stacey. The black liquid that serves as The Bride's lifeblood keeps her mouth and skin permanently stained, a perpetual reminder of her creation not unlike the Creature's stitched forehead. It's a look so instantly iconic that Buckley personally witnessed someone dressed as The Bride in London on Halloween, going off nothing more than a trailer and a few teaser stills from CinemaCon.

Elsa Lanchester's Bride is one of the most identifiable monsters in cinema history, and both Buckley and Gyllenhaal recognize the shadow that looms over them by taking on her story. But it's a necessity when we've culturally romanticized the relationship between The Bride and the Creature, when, as Buckley rightfully points out, "To be 'The Bride of Frankenstein,' to project a title onto somebody without giving them a voice, is in itself a monstrous act."

"To talk about the kind of icon of what this is, and the archetype of what this is, I was definitely conscious of it, but it didn't feel inhibiting to me because I think what Maggie has created is a new language beyond the original," Buckley says. "It's something *other*. I can't really try and replicate what already exists. I have to continue a conversation and find my own monster within this archetype."

The secret sauce of Buckley's Bride was found over a year of discovery. "I'm a bit of a magpie, so I just follow my nose, and once I open up the world of these characters, I'm just looking for something to respond to and react to," she explains with a smile. "And how I prepare is, I put all the inspiration ingredients into the pot, I make the soup, I eat it, and then I let it alone… When I get on set, I take my hands off the wheel, and I stand in front of Christian Bale, and we go, 'Let's go,' which you can imagine is really fun."

It's hard not to draw parallels between this mouthy, fiery, moll-esque Bride and the role that earned Buckley the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Actress in a Musical back in 2021: Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*. Like The Bride, Sally is a vivacious, albeit tragic, figure rich with contradictions, the embodiment of reckless hedonism and the desperate human desire for survival and self-invention. "There aren't many roles like that, that have such an epic landscape for you to really change through," Buckley says. "The kind of umbilical cord between both of these things is about a voice and an expression being taken away, or being discovered out of oppression, and puppeteering, and capitalism and fascism, and how we can maybe drink the Kool-Aid without recognizing what it is, until we can't but revolt against it."

The internal rebellion of both of these women was, for Buckley, like her own primal scream finally erupting from within and demanding to be recognized. "It was wanting to live with the too-muchness, which isn't too much," she says. They're the types of women that she's willing to play for the rest of her life. "I really feel like I've been given an education I didn't even know was possible, and out of that education has become such a freedom, and a relationship to being alive in a way that I just didn't ever, ever, ever think was possible," she says. "I love my job. I love creating. I love the women I've been lucky enough to play, and the collaborators I've been lucky enough to create with, whether that's Maggie or Chloé [Zhao] or Sarah Polley… I have been very, very, very fortunate to meet these extraordinary forces of nature."

The Bride herself is a force of nature, and one that expresses the righteous anger that plagues so many people who have been made to feel othered or objectified, and unable to express that anger with sincerity. "[*The Bride!*] is about telling the truth really radically, sometimes violently," Gyllenhaal says. "But I hope that it's a wild, triumphant celebration of all of us and the aspects of everyone that just cannot fit into the box."

Many will say that this is Maggie Gyllenhaal and Jessie Buckley's take on *Frankenstein* or *The Bride of Frankenstein*, but even that's not accurate. This is the story of *The* motherfucking *Bride*, and she belongs to no one but herself. 💀

BEN PETRIE AND GRACE GLOWICKI GET MESSY.

THE STENCH OF *LOVE* IS IN THE AIR:

GRACE GLOWICKI ON *Dead Lover*

BY BRANDON STREUSSNIG

The writer/director of *TITO* serves an odoriferous new offering.

"I always set out to make a movie that looks like a Hollywood movie, and somehow I always end up with these crunchy arthouse films," says Grace Glowicki, ruminating on her aesthetic.

She continues, "I don't know what it is, but I think I'm just stuck making stuff that looks kind of crunchy and DIY for whatever reason." As enticing as a big, Hollywood production with Glowicki's talent behind it might be, what she's been able to pull off with so little is astonishing. Over two films, first *Tito* and now *Dead Lover*, Glowicki has established herself as a true outsider with weirdo, often gross, sensibilities in a sea of independent horror that can sometimes veer into homogeneity.

The term "sicko" gets thrown around a little too much in the age of instant communication. It's become easier than ever to find our flock. We all know each other's weirdest secrets, and now, if you even have a passing glance at the strange, you're a "sicko." For Grace Glowicki, it's an ethos. In *Dead Lover*, presented at some screenings in "Stink-O-Vision," you can literally smell the decaying corpses and wet, goopy mud wafting off the screen.

"I can't really figure out why, but right now it does seem to be in the zeitgeist. People are really into weirdness and absurdism and grossness," she says, touching on the way audiences are latching onto her brand of disgusting. "Doing this Stink-O-Vision thing, people are just really loving all the gross smells."

Perhaps after eons of nostalgia for the '80s, we've finally hit a yearning for the '90s. "Remember Gooey Louie? The game where you pick boogers?" she asks, reminiscing about the halcyon days of 1995, when kids were sold snot and slime. There's something communal about smelling something awful together. "But yeah, everyone's always like, 'Ew, that smells so bad!'" laughs Glowicki, relishing in the experience she's created for her audiences. Whatever the case may be, Glowicki has hit upon something putrid yet tactile. Beneath the grime, though, there's a beating heart to *Dead Lover* that takes the movie from "ew!" to "aw!"

A very loose *Frankenstein* riff ("I've never read *Frankenstein*. I'm not that familiar with the story at all," Glowicki says. "So, I really wasn't trying to make a *Frankenstein* movie. It was more just this pop culture reference that I knew enough about to riff on."), *Dead Lover* follows a lonely grave digger, played by Glowicki. The grave digger, aptly named, well, Grave Digger, is covered in mud, sweat, and God knows what else. Treated as a pariah by her townspeople, she one day meets The Sailor (played by Glowicki's husband, fellow filmmaker and co-writer Ben Petrie), who is immediately overcome by lust for her rancid stench. From here, a whirlwind romance ensues until Sailor is lost at sea, and only a finger is retrieved. Using just his finger, Grave Digger becomes determined to bring Sailor back to life by any means necessary. Through a pastiche of black box theater, silent film, and wonderfully silly animated effects, *Dead Lover* calls upon everything from *Bride of Re-Animator* to *Monty Python* while never straying from that dripping, crunchy vision.

With a ridiculous and purposely bad Cockney accent and a penchant for screwball slapstick, Glowicki's approach to performance is an idiosyncratic delight. There are so few roles like this written for women, Glowicki admits, saying, "I grew up watching Jim Carrey and *The Big Lebowski*. I kept trying to think of a female equivalent, and I just couldn't." It wasn't only a yearning to see women be funny on screen – there's plenty of that. Glowicki sought to be "inappropriate" and "unfuckable." Citing Joan Crawford's late-career run in hagsploitation films, Glowicki continues, "the way she made sense of staying relevant while being a woman that was aging out of being considered beautiful and fuckable is so cool to me. She found a space for herself outside of what everyone was comfortable with. I wanted to see more of that." The Grave Digger may be "unfuckable" in a traditional sense, but *Dead Lover* challenges what that even means. Why shouldn't a stinky, dirty outcast be afforded love? Sailor certainly finds something special in her.

"I'm obsessed with characters that feel outside of social culture, pariahs," she explains. "They're longing for

"I'm obsessed with characters that feel outside of social culture, pariahs, they're longing for connection and don't really know how to achieve it and clumsily reach for it." -Grace Glowicki

GLOWICKI GETS A SANGUINATED SPLASH FROM THE MAKEUP DEPARTMENT.

LEAH DOZ CHANNELS HER INNER MAD SCIENTIST.

connection and don't really know how to achieve it and clumsily reach for it." As the town gossips about her experiments and she's rebuffed by anyone within smelling distance, there's something so lovely about The Grave Digger's adherence to being her uninhibited self. In many ways, she's more in touch with her sexuality than anyone around her.

"I'm always trying to honor the emotional integrity of the character," Glowicki says, elaborating, "I think the gross stuff that goes on top of it, it's tethered to something quite human and universal. That's why stuff hopefully lands in a way that's not laughing at it, but laughing with it." Whether it's scraping goo off the ground and tasting it, only to find it's come from a vagina, or using the reanimated finger to, well, finger herself, the outcast is exploring what anyone else might – she's just open about it. "It's just gross," laughs Glowicki. "I remember being thirteen and boys on the playground being like, 'Uh, someone got fingered,' it's just so funny and gross and weird." It's these little touchpoints that ground the absurdity of *Dead Lover* into something recognizable and honest about being awkward around bodies.

Tying Glowicki's gloopy vision together is a fearlessness around gender. In *Tito*, she played an awkward, shut-in guy, and here, in *Dead Lover*, her cast's gender is fully amorphous. As Sailor, Petrie is far more typically feminine than the woman he's pursuing. As Grave Digger, it was a challenge for her to create something she'd never seen before. "When I think of a grave digger, I inherently think of a man," she says, "I thought, that's so interesting that my brain can't even fathom a female gravedigger. That's what guides me. It's silly that we can't imagine that. I'm seeking a greater portrayal of what women can be."

Elsewhere, a cast of women wear beards and play strong, gruff men. "There's no political thesis or anything about queerness," stresses Glowicki. In her worlds, gender isn't something to dwell on. Its fluidity is simply reality. "It comes from a frustration of not seeing female characters with the same richness as male characters. Defying expectations and getting off on that rebellion," she says, while also citing the long tradition of gender-swapping in comedy. "Look at the *SNL* cast and how it's like, 'Okay, someone has to play this woman,' and I just love that they don't limit themselves. *Monty Python*, too. There's something fun about that fluidity in performance."

Grace Glowicki may not be striving for any grand statements on gender or kink shaming, but by being exactly who she is, the audacity permeates like a rotting lover. She's a wildly funny and singular filmmaker whose work may be "crunchy" and strange, but she always finds the human being inside. Her loners' search for belonging is what it means to live.

"It's just being a human," she agrees, "I'll never know what it's like to be you, you'll never know what it's like to be me. Even if we connect, there's such an expanse between us. I think it's made me always just long for connection." In *Frankenstein*, the old cliché is that "man was the monster all along." Maybe that's true, but *Dead Lover* posits that might not be such a bad thing. Just reach out and pull the finger. 💀

PHOTOS BY IAN COMPTON, COLIN MEDLEY & DOMINIQUE VANDERBERG COURTESY OF CARTUNA X DWECK

PILLOW TALK: PETRIE AND GLOWICKI ARE TENDED TO BEFORE A TAKE.

FOR *SLASHER: FLESH & BLOOD*, MONICA PAVEZ (LEFT) AND ALEXANDRA ANGER (RIGHT) GOT TO CORPSE-IFY THE LEGENDARY DAVID CRONENBERG. THE PAIR ALSO LENT AN EAR OR TEN TO HIS *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE* (BELOW).

THAT'S A SUMMONS, MATE:

AN INTERVIEW WITH BLACK SPOT FX

Alexandra Anger and Monica Pavez open the doors to their FX shop and give us the grue.

BY SHARRI BOHANNON

While many people baked bread in 2020, Alexandra Anger and Monica Pavez founded Black Spot FX. These ladies of gore have carved out a very impressive special effects makeup path in the years since. Many people have seen their work on David Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future* and *The Shrouds* and Caitlin Cronenberg's *Humane*, as well as recent prosthetics work for *Black Phone* 2. However, Shudder subscribers might know them best for their bloody contributions to the shows *Slasher* and *Hell Motel*. They were kind enough to invite us into their FX shop to talk about their gory work, starting a company in a pandemic, and what it's like being women in a male-dominated field.

PHOTO (TOP) BY DAMON BISHOP
(BOTTOM) BY MONICA PAVEZ

You started your business in 2020, which was quite a year. What made you feel the perfect time to begin this adventure was in the middle of that chaos?

Alexandra Anger: It was *Slasher: Flesh & Blood*, season four. I had been on *Slasher* since season one because of who I was working for at the time. [It was] truly me figuring out my job, which was amazing. I owe so much to all those people and the show itself, because it's always been supportive, wonderful, and creative. But in season four, we had an opportunity, just based on where people were at and what was going on, to do it ourselves. Mon has been doing [the show] since season two. So, after being in lockdown for however long that was, and feeling like everything could burn down tomorrow...

Monica Pavez: We were in a position – at that moment, we both had jobs lined up as things were starting to get back into production. So, it was this magic moment: there's this one path that is very safe and secure, and we know what to expect. But there's also this other opportunity presenting itself that, listen, if all that happens is we do one season, then we have to sell everything off and go back to working for other people, so be it.

Anger: Between [*Slasher* creators] Aaron Martin, Ian Carpenter, and the wonderful [episode director] Adam MacDonald, we love working with those people so much. We also knew that [*Slasher*] was going to be insanely intense, but so much fun. It's always fun, even when you're absolutely in the trenches of it, which is truly every season. But yeah, we had the opportunity, and it was totally nuts, but it was super fun.

Would you be down for another season of *Slasher*?

Anger: I owe everything to *Slasher*. From boots on the ground, in the trenches, figuring it out – my heart and soul love *Slasher*, and I hope that we're doing *Slasher* season 93.

Is *Slasher: Flesh & Blood* how you met David Cronenberg?

Anger: Because of that season, we met Cronenberg, who's an angel. He'd come in for a life cast and casually mentioned that he was gearing up to make a film. He [said], 'Hey, I might need some bodies.' We laughed and were like, 'See you later.'

Pavez: 'Great! Good luck getting those.'

Anger: Yeah, exactly. Like, have fun with whoever it is, because why on earth would it be us? And we did makeups on him, and it was wonderful. But he wasn't there on set when we had his body because he was dead at that point. That's his character, obviously. At the end of the season, they did a press day, and they asked us to bring the body because they wanted him to come and see it. I think that everyone was expecting him to be like, 'My God,' but it's David Cronenberg.

Pavez: A relatively contained individual.

Anger: In the best way. So, he [said], 'This is so interesting, and thank you so much,' and that was it. A few months later he asked via our *Slasher* creatives whether he could borrow the body. He wanted to make a short film which, obviously we [were happy to agree] as long as all of the creatives were okay with it. They totally were, so we carted his body over to his house and took it up to the top bedroom and sort of, you know...

Pavez: ...tucked it in bed.

Anger: He and his daughter made this beautiful short film with it [*The Death of David Cronenberg*]. Looking back now, we [realize] that was the interview. We all got along, it was all good, but that felt like that was sort of

PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA ANGER

CORTEON MOORE LOSES HIS LIMBS ON THE SET OF *SLASHER: FLESH & BLOOD*, COURTESY OF BLACK SPOT FX. CREW MEMBERS PASCAL BENNETT, JAMES BINKLEY, AND SCOTT MCCLELLAN ARE UNFAZED.

the launching point. Then his forever production designer, Carol [Spier], reached out a few months later and said, 'We're prepping for this thing,' and asked if we would be interested. We [said], 'Of course.' It was wild. Truly looking back, it's just mind-blowing what happened.

Can we talk about your time on set for *Crimes of the Future*? What are some of your favorite memories and pieces?

Anger: I think from circumstance, memory, wild time... I cannot believe we pulled it off. I'm sort of glad that my head didn't really, fully comprehend what was happening. The experience of being in Greece and meeting wonderful people, and an amazing crew. Cronenberg being who he is, and just having a bunch of opportunities to do some really cool shit.

Pavez: I would add on to that, I would say specifically the Klinik/Ear Man makeup, because of the genesis of that makeup. It started as it was going to be a set of extra ears behind [his ears], and a set of ears on his head; that was it. As we got closer and closer to the shoot day for that, the task then became: 'As many as you guys can possibly get on him.' Again, from the wild memories of Alex being on set in Greece, dealing with whatever we were shooting that day, and then me looking like something out of *Breaking Bad* in our trailer, our converted chip truck trailer, just running as many ears [as possible] around, respirator on, walking out into a beautiful Athenian sunset. The whole experience of it, and then having it go so well that Alex played the surgeon in that scene, which was a last-minute addition. It was like a one-and-done take. We didn't have to reset anything because Cronenberg was so happy with how the sewing went. There was this sort of manic confidence!

As with most industries, this one is a very male-dominated field. We hear about Tom Savini and Stan Winston, but we never hear about all the women who are also doing the work. Part of why I get excited when I see your names pop up is that it's not more dudes doing things.

Pavez: I mean, it's an interesting dynamic. Not that it was necessarily front of mind when we started Black

PHOTO BY DARRYL FRASER

ANGER TENDS TO A SEVERED HEAD ON THE SET OF *SLASHER: RIPPER.*

THE TAP WATER RUNS A LITTLE TOO HOT AT THE *HELL MOTEL.*

PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA ANGER

MORE HEADS! PAVEZ AND A PAL HANG ON THE SET OF *SLASHER: FLESH & BLOOD.*

PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA ANGER

PHOTOS BY MONICA PAVEZ

(TOP) DENISE CAPEZZA GETS GILLED IN *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE*; (BOTTOM) ANGER AND CREW TEND TO THE FILM'S "SARK."

Spot, but definitely in hindsight, and was probably there at some point while we were making the decision. Realizing that by and large, a lot of the shops that exist might have a man as the owner and the name. But the majority of the day-to-day running and coordinating, a lot of the work going into keeping that business running is being done by a woman. So much of the running of an FX shop is about those soft skills. Things like conflict resolution between the people working for you, training people properly, making sure that everyone's feeling comfortable in the space that they're working in, health and safety. Just like all of these other things that aren't the glam and flash and fun parts of the industry, which are obviously amazing and you love to do. There's so much more to it and the organization, the scheduling and talking to production, and setting expectations, and the diplomacy that's inherent in that job. Looking around and being like, 'We were doing all of those things already. So, maybe we start doing them for ourselves and have full autonomy within the projects that we decide to take on.' Having a light bulb moment of, 'I think we can do this because I think we're doing it already.'

Anger: I think one of the benefits in most of our contacts starting via email, or somebody passing along our names, is that because I go by Alex and tend to sign off by Alex, the amount of Zooms that I will hop on, and you immediately see it takes a minute for some people [to adjust to the realization that I'm a woman and in charge]. Even at the end of an hour-long Zoom where we're talking about very detailed portions of the build, where hopefully, via my actual experience, there's been some version of respect gained, not that that should be [necessary], and I shouldn't have to vibe with that. They'll still ask, 'So who do you work for?' We'll talk about the specifics of a build. Then they're like, 'Oh, you do know what you're doing?' Why would I be on this Zoom if I didn't? We're not cold calling you, you know. Why would that be the case? Happy to interview, of course, but very odd. It is hard to believe that, had it been 'Alexander' popping on the call, they [still would have asked], 'So, who do you work for?'

I know a lot of people think they know what you do and are very comfortable getting on social media and saying anything. What is one misconception that you would like to disabuse people of about your job?

Pavez: I don't know that it would be one single thing, but I think about a show like [the long-running SyFy effects makeup competition] *Face Off* that started, and on the one hand, it's amazing that it introduced a lot of people to a career that they wouldn't have known about otherwise. Like any other reality TV show, it is a production. You are picking and choosing the parts that you show. I think for a certain amount of filmmakers coming up, it sort of introduced the idea that there's a super quick turnaround. That it only takes, you know, one or two people to maybe see it through.

Anger: I feel like the other thing that I would want to say from a whole industry standpoint, but [also] a prosthetic-specific standpoint, is that it's very easy to hate on things from your couch. We're all guilty of it. And yes, there are bad makeups that happen. Some people aren't good. Sometimes it just didn't happen. Whatever. There are lots of circumstances. Most people aren't trying to do a bad thing. So, try to give people grace, to understand that they might have shot that [makeup] fourteen hours after it was put on. Which is almost guaranteed, to be clear, it's almost guaranteed. Who knows what was going on? They could have been shooting in the middle of winter, fourteen hours into a day, with an actor who wouldn't stop moving their face. Who knows?

Pavez: Or with pieces that weren't made to fit.

Anger: Absolutely. There are just a million circumstances. We will all be full of judgment always, that's the way things go, but just for your brain and everyone else's, choose the kind route. Assume that somebody went in doing their best, because why wouldn't you assume that?

MORE CARNAGE FROM *SLASHER: RIPPER*, INCLUDING EAR TRAUMA FOR BRANDON OAKES (RIGHT).

PHOTOS BY ALEXANDRA ANGER, MONICA PAVEZ 7 DAMON BISHOP

COMMITTING *CRIMES*: THE TORSO OF TASSOS KARAHALIOS; (BELOW LEFT) PAVEZ AND ANGER MAKE A BABY; (BELOW RIGHT) YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS OURS.

BECOMING BEN: CRACKING THE CODE TO PRIMATE'S PRACTICAL GORE FEST

BY AMELIA EMBERWING

HOW A KEY SCRIPT CHANGE, A CHIMP PERFORMANCE AND A SMALL ARMY OF BELOW-THE-LINE WORKERS MADE *PRIMATE* WORK.

There's nothing more heartbreaking than losing a loved one. Except, of course, watching that loved one descend to madness and brutally off all your *other* loved ones, forcing you to eventually do the unthinkable. That's the emotional core of Johannes Roberts' *Primate*, but it also loosely belongs to another horror classic.

"I'm a massive *Cujo* fan," Roberts tells Fango. "So initially it was a dog, but that was years ago." In fact, Roberts first started working on the treatment that would eventually become *Primate* before taking up the *47 Meters* films. After the director spent a couple of turns playing in shark-infested waters, he returned to the script and realized that a straight *Cujo* remake would be the wrong move. "About five years ago, probably, we were sort of developing it, then [the animal] changed. That [change] became so intrinsic to the whole story. It was like, 'Oh, why has this not always been the way it was?'"

Primate follows a family on what is undoubtedly the worst night of their collective lives, even considering the fact that they've recently lost their wife/mother to cancer.

PHOTOS COURTESY PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Together, Adam (Troy Kotsur) and his late wife worked closely with chimpanzees. So close, in fact, that one lives in the family's Hawaii home. But something's not quite right with the chimp when daughter Lucy (Johnny Sequoyah) and her friends return home for a brief visit.

With *Cujo*, the connection between the family and the animal is a little bit different. You'll never catch this writer saying something like "It's just a dog," but the emotionality between a chimpanzee and a dog is different. Ben, *Primate*'s infected chimp, is treated like a member of the family, capable of communication and illustrating a full range of emotions beyond the standard pet-like loyalty. "I felt like the heart of Lucy was always the fact that this was like her brother turning against her," says Sequoyah of her character's motivations after the Ben Lucy once knew is lost to rabies. For Oscar-winner Kotsur's Adam, that connection hits even deeper thanks to his late wife. "When I see Ben, you know, it's almost like my wife's spirit."

The closeness that the family feels with Ben and the collective loss they share act as a critical connective tissue throughout the film – in part because they add an emotional throughline, but also because the horrors that unfold become all the more devastating thanks to how the *audience* feels about both Ben and his struggling family.

Of course, neither that emotional throughline nor the contrasting, gruesome meanness of *Primate* works without Ben actor Miguel Torres Umba.

WHO NEEDS MO-CAP? BEN GETS TOUCHED UP ON SET, THEN COACHED BY DIRECTOR JOHANNES ROBERTS (BELOW).

Primate makes its nasty intentions known just seconds into the film, kicking things off with a device that Roberts traditionally does not care for. "I'm not a huge fan of cold opens. They tend to just annoy me," he says. But he knew that the energy of *Primate* required the film to show some of its hand right off the bat. "Because it's quite unique, the tone of this movie is a really tricky one. It just felt that I needed to settle the audience in straight away [so they] knew what kind of movie they were going to get."

Setting the tone within minutes by way of graphic death by chimp is critical to *Primate*'s success when it comes to immediately engaging the audience, but before

NO, IT ONLY *LOOKS* LIKE DIRECTOR ROBERTS IS EXPLAINING A GRIM SET ACCIDENT TO A NEWS CREW.

BEN (MIGUEL TORRES UMBA) AND LUCY (JOHNNY SEQUOYAH) BATTLE IT OUT FOR THE CAMERAS.

the script and editing comes Umba's pivotal performance not just as Ben's voice, but his expressions, movement, and emotions. The chimp in this film is completely practical – something that was important to Roberts from the start.

Additional animation is, of course, used to spruce up every practical-focused studio film. Beyond the masks, costumes, animatronics, puppets and actors is a team of people from Millennium FX making sure everything looks just right. But Roberts understands how critical it is to avoid the dreaded "We'll fix it in post" mentality. "You have to be able to look at something and go, 'Yeah, that's great,'" well before it reaches the VFX stages," he explains.

For Umba, that meant a lot of work before he even stepped on set. "Once I was cast, I had two months of preparation, working with the movement director and the stunt team, just in order to get my body physically prepared for the demands of it," he says.

And demanding it was. Umba spends all of his time on camera in a chimp-esque crouch, much of which is either backed up by slow, threatening crawling or breakneck manic attacks on his human counterparts.

"A lot of the fight scene was Miguel and I working together," Kotsur says of a climactic fight between Adam and Ben. "We did have an amazing stunt coordinator and choreographer, and we rehearsed several times before we shot that scene. It was really a lot of fun. It was a great experience. We had to really play with props and blood and gore."

What makes the aforementioned scene and any other set piece where Ben is moving quickly so remarkable is that not only is the actor sweltering under the layers of makeup, prosthetics and costume, Umba can also barely see or hear.

"My contact lenses are quite big, but also my field of vision is very tiny. Inside the mask, I can't hear what's happening outside, so I had to have ear monitors in order to communicate," Umba says. "It takes a lot of physical training and concentration to really try to be in the moment as the character in such a difficult and challenging environment."

As you might expect, it's the fighting and other quick movement scenes that take the biggest physical toll on the actor as he performs. However, Umba is more focused on singing the praises of the small army it took to bring Ben to life.

"The Millennium FX people [had a team of around] fifty making the costume. That in itself is extraordinary," Umba says. "Then on set, there's a team of around twelve people around me to make sure everything is right and ready, as well as my movement director and obviously Johannes and the rest of the cast. So Ben is more than just one creature, but is made up of so many people. I think in terms of practical effects, that's what makes it special, right? Because it's so much craft, so many people involved in making it happen, that it made it unique."

Umba isn't alone in his praise for the below-the-line team that brought Ben and *Primate* to life. "I want to give a shout out to the FX team," Sequoyah says. "I think that it's really important to honor them, too, because they did an incredible job. And I mean, having like a six-person team just for saliva on a chimp mouth, like it was, that was such a brilliant thing to be able to watch. I was really, really grateful to learn from that experience."

And there you have it. Come for the juxtaposition between deep emotional moments and violence; stay for the team who made *Primate*'s practical splatter fest possible!

PHOTOS BY GARETH GATRELL COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

THE PRIMATERIALISTS

BY RICHARD NEWBY

Go ape with us as we round up these pestilent primates in prose.

PRIMATE (STARRING MIGUEL TORRES UMBA AND TROY KOTSUR) IS THE LATEST IN A LONG TRADITION OF "SPIRALIN' SIMIAN" MOVIES.

PHOTO (TOP) BY GARETH GATRELL COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

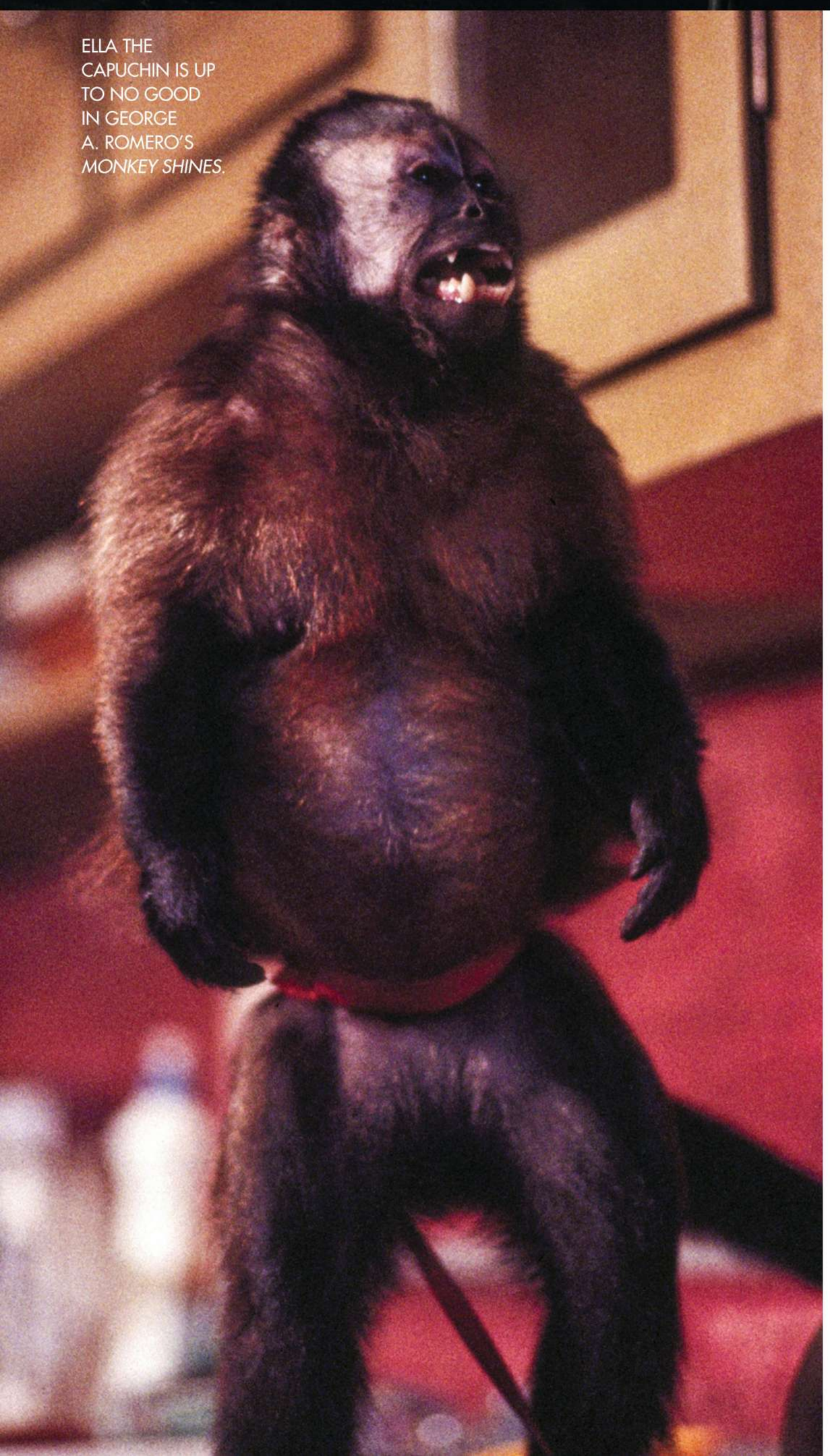
Zoological horror movies have left no stone unturned, no jungle unexplored, no farm unharvested or ocean unclaimed. But there's one animal that's of greater concern than the rest. Jordan Peele knew it. George A. Romero knew it. Richard Franklin knew it. Dario Argento knew it. And Johannes Roberts shows he knows it, too, with his latest feature *Primate* (see page 69). But, at least in the realm of popular horror fiction, Edgar Allan Poe may have known it first, this simple truth at the heart of horror: Primates can fuck you up. I believe the late Jane Goodall may have said something along those lines once. But within primate-centric horror there exists an uneasy consideration of the dangers invited by behavioral imitation, evolutionary theory, ownership and humanization versus dehumanization.

In Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," famed detective C. Auguste Dupin discovers that the hand behind the murder of two women isn't man's but an orangutan. "The gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and activity, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these Mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once," says the narrator. That last line, "I understood the full horrors of the murder," is the sticking point, the realization worth examining. There is the horror that exists on the surface, the fact that an ape, a seemingly lesser being, was behind the murders that initially appeared so calculated and misogynistic. But underneath that, it's plausible to suspect the narrator's horror stems from how similar the act of an orangutan is to that of man. After all, the orangutan was only mimicking his owner shaving when he cut the first woman's throat with a straight razor. Like the famous '80s anti-drug PSA, the Orangutan's motive could simply be boiled down to: "I learned it by watching you!"

Studies show that there's only a 15% difference between humans and chimpanzees, though a variance

THE OMEN SHOWED THE DANGERS OF BRINGING THE SPAWN OF SATAN TO A NATURE SAFARI.

MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE FEATURES BELA LUGOSI AND A HUGE GORILLA: A DEADLY COMBINATION ON THE BEST OF DAYS.



ELLA THE CAPUCHIN IS UP TO NO GOOD IN GEORGE A. ROMERO'S *MONKEY SHINES*.

in chromosome count and other genetic factors further separate us from our hairier brethren. Still, chimpanzees and bonobos are our closest genetic relatives, and we share a common ancestry. Much of our fascination with apes comes down to this relation and the uncanny similarities we share as primates. And so much of the barely contained contempt we see from characters in ape-related horror comes from the way we see ourselves in them and believe they in us, leading to a symptomatic connection that has been given both supernatural and pseudo-scientific relevancy.

For example, take the baboons in Richard Donner's *The Omen*, who go, well, apeshit, at the safari park upon encountering Damien Thorn. They serve as early warning detectors of the evil harbored within the child. What they fear should also be what we fear. Or take the chimpanzee, Inga, in Dario Argento's *Phenomena*, whose Poe-inspired role sees her perform as both forensic detective and straight-razor-wielding killer, although this time to protect a young woman rather than murder her. And going back to the realm of short horror fiction, W. W. Jacobs' "The Monkey's Paw" imbues the object of the title with powerful and dangerous magic. These stories, while not simian-centric, show a preternatural intuition that places them on some higher, unknowable, wavelength than man.

Of course, with pseudoscience, there is the racial factor, too, in which "man" becomes an offensively limited categorization. It is impossible to fully reflect on the history of ape horror without recognizing the racism of the 18th and 19th century evolutionary theory in which several doctors including Benjamin Rush, Josiah C. Nott and George Gliddon, among others, used the studies of Darwin and Mendel to conclude that Black people were much closer to apes than white men, and used skin color and phrenology to support these inherently evil claims. These claims led to calling Black people apes and the creation of offensive caricatures and depictions. Africans, and therefore their

descendants, were seen as a less-human evolutionary bridge between apes and Europeans, who were considered the perfected evolutionary result, y'know, minus a habit of spreading a plague here and there. In the early 20th century, these same claims of genetic superiority were adopted by the Nazis and ultimately used to commit genocide.

As a Black writer, it can be uncomfortable to both acknowledge the similarities that exist between apes and humans, which have absolutely nothing to do with race, but also deal with the fact that, because those racist ideologies are still present today, some still look at ape-centric movies of the early 20th century, like 1933's *King Kong*, and see them as metaphors for Black people in so-called white spaces. So, on one hand, Robert Florey's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* can be enjoyed as a madcap Gothic thriller in which a mad scientist, Dr. Mirakle (Bela Lugosi) is injecting women with ape blood to try to find a mate for his pet, Erik, and thus prove the link between man and ape. But on the other, particularly given the time, there is a question of whether the film is fueling racist fears of then-popularized theories of Black men wanting to claim white women and create a new species through miscegenation.

Later primate-focused horror films became less about the shock of an ape in the "civilized" world of man, and more about projecting human emotion onto them until the difference between them and humans was practically indiscernible. Richard Franklin's hidden 1986 gem *Link* depicts, as the title suggests, a highly intelligent chimpanzee, Link, who is the bridge between lesser primates and humans.

LINK, IN THE FILM *LINK*, HAS HAD IT WITH HUMANS.

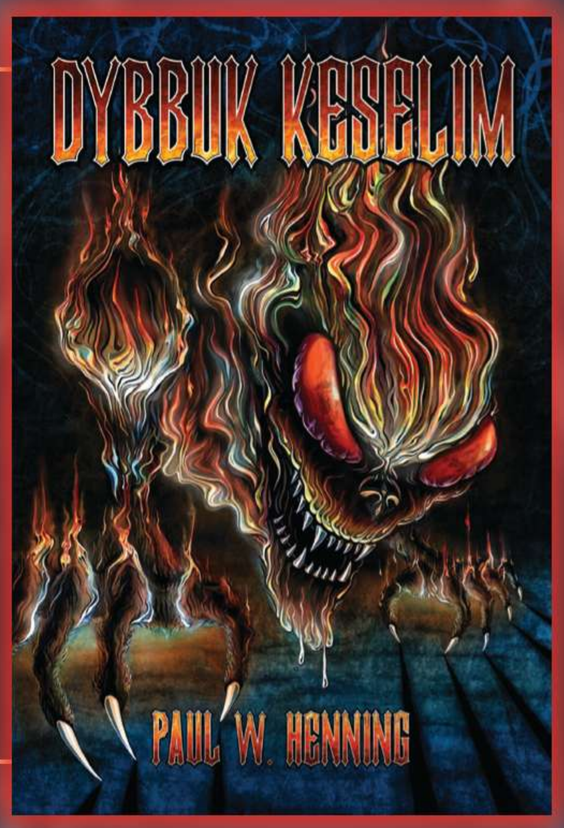
The so-called chimp, funny enough, is played by an orangutan, but hey, it's a living. Link, a former circus act, wears clothes, smokes cigars, and puts on a whole butler routine. It is eerily charming. But Link is also violent and manipulative, and oh, he also likes to watch his new caretaker, Jane (Elisabeth Shue) undress and bathe. He covets Jane and desires freedom, believing himself to be a little too close to man. The film is a fitting companion piece with George A. Romero's *Monkey Shines*, in which a Capuchin monkey, Ella, works as a service animal for Allan (Jason Beghe), a quadriplegic law student. After Ella is injected with an experimental serum that gives her a telepathic connection to Allan, she begins acting on his thoughts, sharing a bond that, for Ella, develops into romantic feelings that manifest as jealousy towards Allan's girlfriend. Both films operate under the semi-sympathetic notion that humans want to understand primates better because primates want to be like us.

It's easy to humanize primates. After all, we're primates, too. And is 15% really that much of a genetic difference? Even Goodall, for all her brilliance, wasn't exempt from criticism of projecting onto them and getting too close, resulting in injury. We've heard and seen what chimps are capable of, from Frodo, who attacked Goodall and cartoonist Gary Larson, to Travis who mutilated Charla Nash. Yet there is still a desire to walk the razor's edge and look past the horror and see them as creatures operating with human logic and empathy.

Jordan Peele reframed this in *Nope* with his most horrific scene, reminding us that, however much we do want to think of them as being akin to people, non-human primates are still wild animals. Gordy's home, but he doesn't belong there. But this push and pull between seeing wild primates as extensions of personal feelings, and seeing them as monstrous creatures who only play-act at human behavior as a means to lull us into complacency, is why we keep coming back to them. It's what keeps us admiring them and laughing at them at zoos, watching them on our screens and, sometimes, when our own evolutionary sense of self-preservation fails, into our homes to watch us cook, clean, swim, smoke, and just maybe even shave.

"If you're looking for a novel that excites your imagination, stimulates your mind, and lingers with you long after you've finished, *Dybbuk Keselim* is it. Paul Henning has written something rare—intelligent, thrilling, and unforgettable."

"*Dybbuk Keselim* is an absolute masterpiece—well-written, clever, and completely gripping. From the very first page, it's an edge-of-your-seat experience that refuses to let go."



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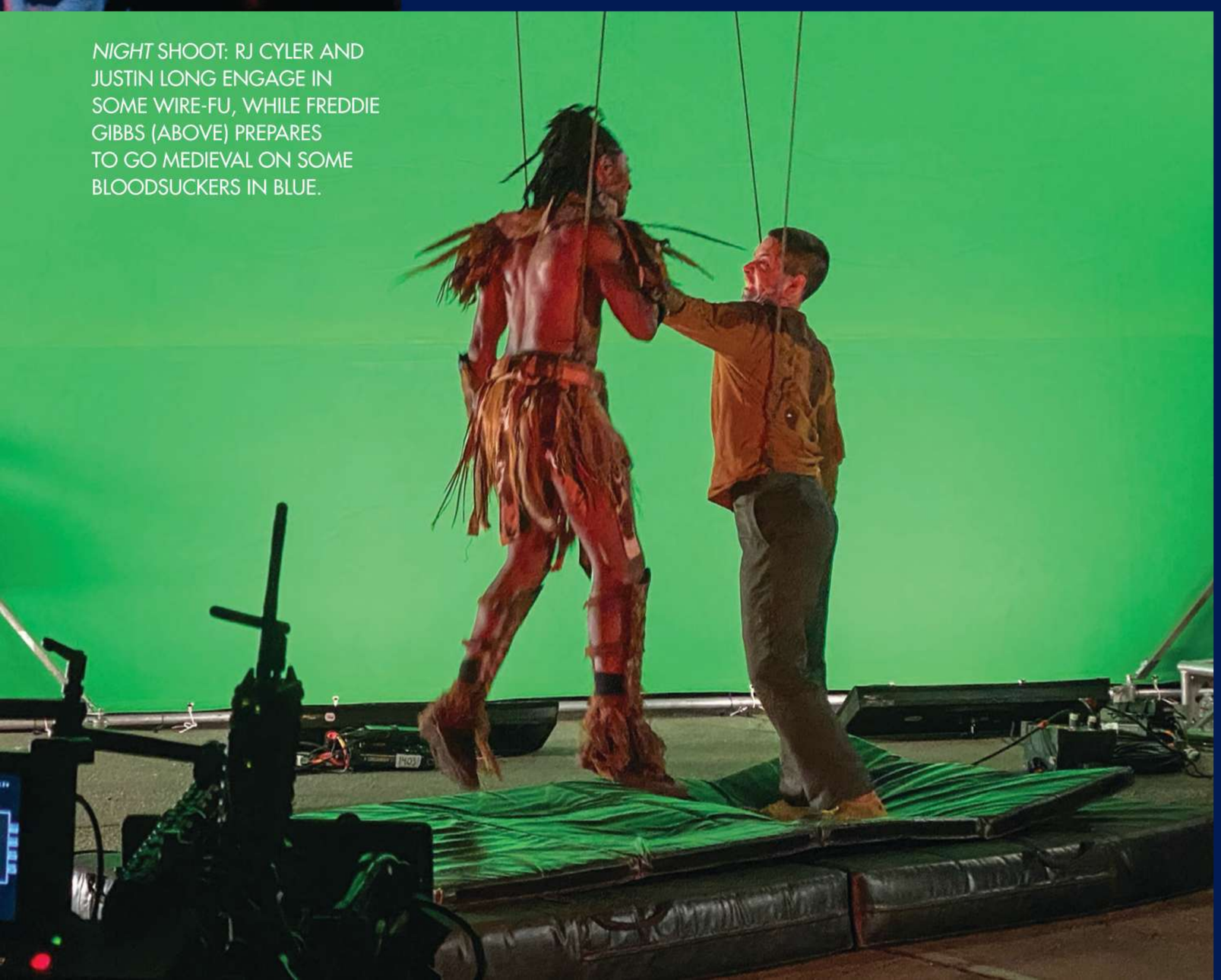
GRAVEYARD SHIFT: ON THE SET OF NIGHT PATROL

BY ANGEL MELANSON

LOWLIFE FILMMAKER RYAN PROWS PULLS AN ALL-NIGHTER, AND FANGORIA IS RIGHT THERE WITH HIM.



NIGHT SHOOT: RJ CYLER AND JUSTIN LONG ENGAGE IN SOME WIRE-FU, WHILE FREDDIE GIBBS (ABOVE) PREPARES TO GO MEDIEVAL ON SOME BLOODSUCKERS IN BLUE.

DEPENDING ON WHAT TYPE OF PERSON YOU ARE, HEADING OUT LATE INTO THE NIGHT TO MEET UP WITH SOME VAMPIRES EITHER SOUNDS LIKE A TERRIBLE IDEA OR A WELCOME, CASUAL INVITATION ONE MONDAY EVENING. OBVIOUSLY, WE HERE AT FANGORIA BELONG TO THE LATTER CATEGORY, AS I'M SURE DO YOU, DEAR READER. AND IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS THAT, LATE ONE NIGHT, I SET OUT INTO THE LOS ANGELES DARK, HEADED FOR THE VALLEY. AFTER ARRIVING AT BASE CAMP, A VAN TAKES ME THE REST OF THE WAY TO THE SET OF RYAN PROWS' *NIGHT PATROL*. AS WE NEAR THE LOCATION, I CAN SEE THE LIGHTS AND FOG ALL PREPPED, SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.

Curious neighbors stand in their doorways to watch the next scene being set up, and producer Josh Goldbloom officially welcomes me to the set of *Night Patrol*. This is a good night to visit – the big finale is being set up as we stand a few feet away, chatting. The finishing touches are placed on

a massive metal rig with a green screen and two harnesses attached, and I watch as Goldbloom fills me in on what this is all about.

"It's the merging of a lot of different genres," Goldbloom explains, specifically citing heavy elements of "urban thriller: we love *Boyz n The Hood*, *Menace II Society*; it's a lot of that."

The movie's title refers to LA's toughest police unit. As it turns out, there's a supernatural twist, and these vampire cops are pitting the local gangs against each other. This story is really about the people in the community fighting back.

Producer Keith Levine admits he wasn't entirely sold on the concept of a vampire cop thriller, but was surprised by the actual script. "You've never seen characters like this take on a problem like this. The perspective and how they go about it is so fresh and so fun." Levine is entirely aware of the qualms that come with breaking and bending the rules a bit: "There are vampire traditionalists," he laughs, "but the whole idea of this is to subvert everything that's come before it and also populate it with a little message, not to have the medicine outdo the sugar."

This project has been a long time coming. Goldbloom met *Night Patrol* director Ryan Prows at the Frightfest premiere of Prows' feature debut *Lowlife* in 2017, and Prows went on to direct a segment in *V/H/S/94*, the 2021 entry in Goldbloom's long-running found footage franchise. The producer recalls his first time reading the script for *Night Patrol* (by Tim Cairo, Jake Gibson and Shaye Ogbonna) and thinking, "It's one of the greatest scripts I've ever read," adding, "The messaging about systemic racism in law enforcement is something I think a lot of people were afraid to touch. And it goes for it – it's not subtle by any means – so it's been an uphill battle trying to get it made, but here we are."

Here we are indeed. Just a few feet away, *Night Patrol* star Justin Long is covered in FX blood, but it's still not quite enough. A team flies in to bloody him up some more, and I have to say he seems to be genuinely and thoroughly enjoying it. Aside from the blood, Long looks quite different from how we're used to seeing him. He's sporting a close shaved head and exuding an overall ruggedness not typical of the characters that make up his extensive filmography. For *Night Patrol*,

PHOTO (LEFT) BY ANGEL MELANSON • PHOTOS COURTESY SHUDDER 8 RLJE (RIGHT) BY BENJAMIN KITCHEN

JUSTIN LONG GETS A BAPTISM BY BLOOD ON THE SET OF *NIGHT PATROL*.

ACAB (ALL COPS ARE BLOODSUCKERS)...
THESE COPS TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME...
MORE LIKE 'GRUE PROCESS" AMIRITE?...
I'LL KEEP GOING.

he looks every bit the action star, fresh from battle and ready for more. As Long's stunt double gets into makeup nearby, the matching shaved heads and blood-soaked faces make the full doppelgänger effect a tad unsettling.

The vibe on set is close-knit; it's clear these are friends and frequent collaborators who have been in the trenches together. And that's true even beyond the producers, writers, and director. Goldbloom brought Long onto *Night Patrol* after working together on *V/H/S/Beyond*. Long's co-star Nicki Micheaux was in Prows' thesis film at AFI, and the writers point out that the role of the community's matriarch was written specifically for her. Gibson highlights another longtime relationship on set: his childhood friend Jon Oswald, whom he met at the age of 11. Even then, Gibson knew, "That's my guy. One of the funniest people I've ever met in my entire life."

"It's the intersection of all our nerd obsessions," adds Cairo. "Horror movies, crime movies, pro wrestling, punk rock – did I miss anything?" He did. Gibson chimes in with "Conspiracy shit, occultism, ensemble pieces," which they all seem to agree on. *Night Patrol* is the Venn diagram of their shared interests.

As the crew makes their final preparations for the big fight scene, RJ Cyler walks out in his full Zulu-inspired regalia. "This is the most extreme shit I've ever put on," he beams. For a guy who has played a Power Ranger, that is a bold statement. RJ cuts a striking silhouette in his ceremonial attire, and I almost feel sorry for the bloodsucking beasts he's about to go up against.

Levine points out the ways in which "Terror," Prows' *V/H/S* segment, "felt like a warmup for this. It was another mashup of a militia trying to weaponize a vampire. I don't know if anyone else could navigate this tone of gritty social realism that slowly segues into horror and supernatural."

One of the many ways Prows wanted to ground the film before launching into vampire wars is through music. Although the producers didn't share exactly what's in store for the film's soundtrack, they did cite the *Judgment Night* soundtrack as a huge source of inspiration and a "north star" that they are all collectively fans of. It's worth noting that the cast itself is made up of several musicians, including Freddie Gibbs, YG, and Flying Lotus, so there may be some fun surprises in store.

When it comes to the fusion of punk rock with hip-hop painting the landscape of Los Angeles, Goldbloom explains, "It's the same messaging from different cultures. There are two styles of music, both angry at the same things." It's a sentiment that pretty much sums up the whole movie – warring gangs from different backgrounds, both angry at the systemic oppression and abuse of power running rampant in the city, set against the backdrop of a whole lot of fun vampire carnage.

Goldbloom shares that the previous night's shoot was a wonderfully explosive, bloody mess. It sounds like the path to this big scene we're about to watch is littered with the corpses of very evil vampires. As the two actors (yes, the actors, not stunt doubles) are secured in their harnesses and hoisted high into the air to engage in a bloody battle, Goldbloom turns to me and grins: "We mostly just really love killing pieces of shit."

RJ CYLER READIES FOR BATTLE.

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SIX OFFICIALLY LICENSED TEES — *TERRIFIER*, *SAW*, *ELVIRA*, *HELLRAISER*, *TWILIGHT*, AND *SCREAM* — LAUNCHED EXCLUSIVELY AT SPENCER'S THIS FALL. THEY'VE NOW ESCAPED THE MALL AND CLAWED THEIR WAY INTO THE FANGO SHOP.

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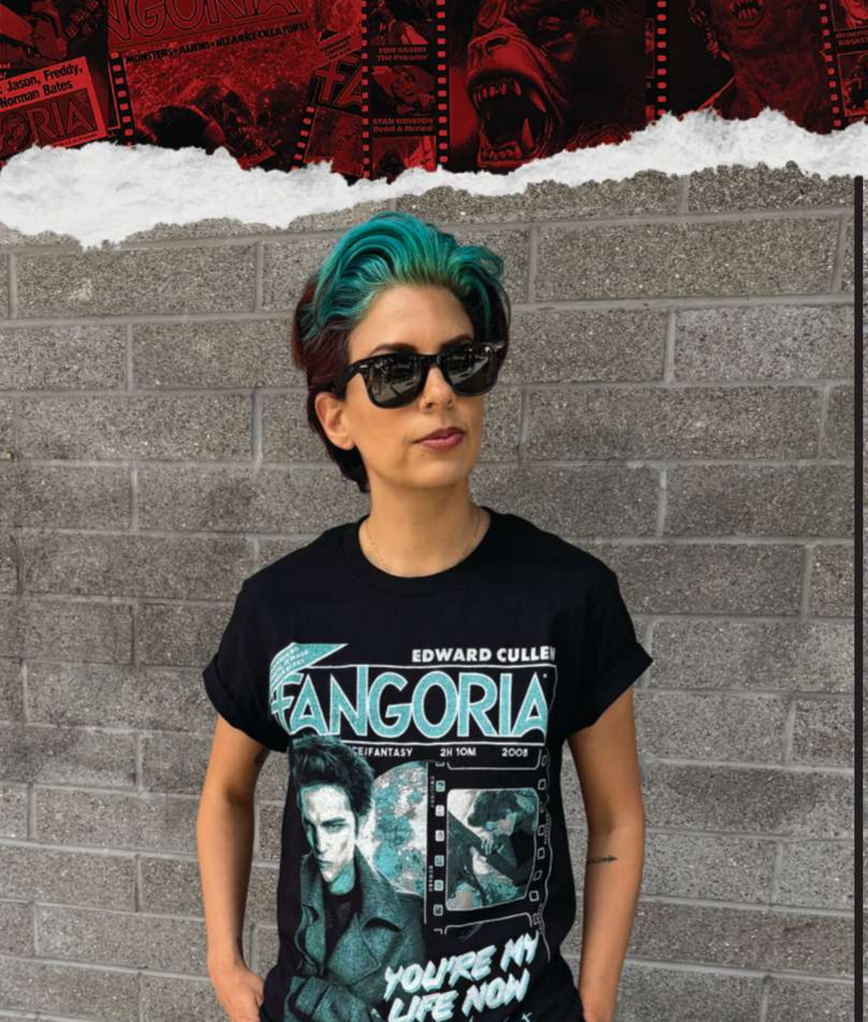
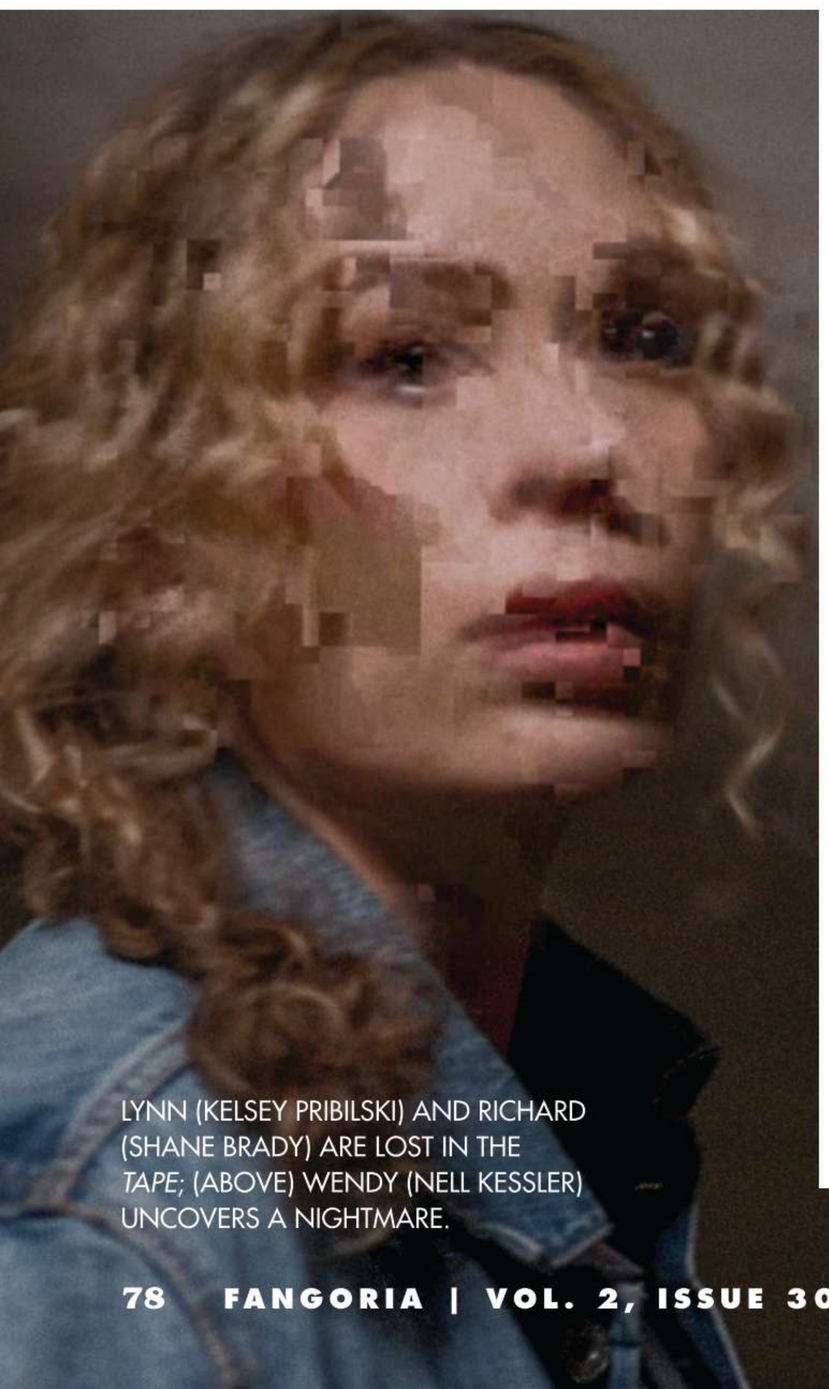


MAN FINDS COSMIC FOOTAGE CRYPTID

BY TONY TIMPONE

WITH *MAN FINDS TAPE*, INDUSTRY VETS PETER S. HALL AND PAUL GANDERSMAN TURN IN A LAYERED AND ASSURED FEATURE FILM DEBUT.

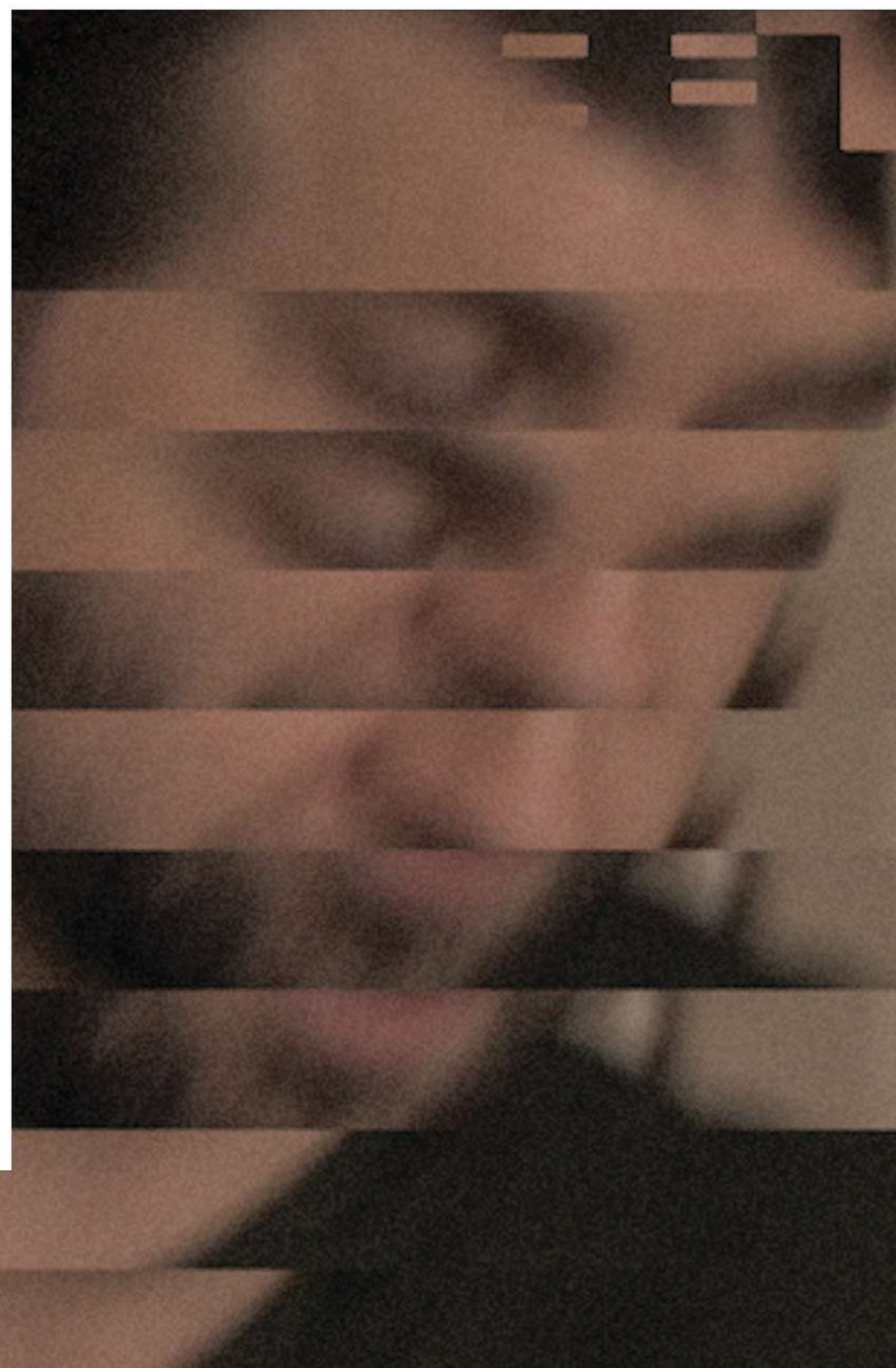


LYNN (KELSEY PRIBILSKI) AND RICHARD (SHANE BRADY) ARE LOST IN THE *TAPE;* (ABOVE) WENDY (NELL KESSLER) UNCOVERS A NIGHTMARE.

Over 25 years since the release of *The Blair Witch Project*, the found-footage genre gets a refreshing jolt with *Man Finds Tape*, now available on VOD from Magnet Releasing.

After a podcaster uncovers surveillance footage depicting a murder, he and his sister return to their Texas hometown where nobody has a memory of the incident. A creepy preacher and a stranger with supernatural powers add to the weirdness…

Man Finds Tape marks the screenwriting and directorial debut of Austin's Peter S. Hall and Paul Gandersman, who met while producing films for other local creatives. "The plan was to make it as a scripted podcast," Hall says of the project's origins. "This was probably ten years ago before



scripted podcasts were really a thing. The idea of an investigative journalist using an audio documentary format to investigate this mystery was there from the beginning. In regard to the actual story itself of a viral video getting investigated, there was nothing specific that triggered it. It was just the idea. Paul and I love stories. We were inspired deeply by the *X-Files* ethos of, 'I want to believe.' A kid who grows up with monster movies and the idea of Bigfoot and Cryptids being out there, how would we make our version of that story in the Reddit age?"

Gandersman adds: "When we were figuring out the parameters of the movie we wanted to make as our first feature, just based on what we felt we could get made no matter what, we came up with the fictional documentary format. Then we talked about what we wanted to accomplish, what we wanted our rules for ourselves to be. Like, there can't be a moment where the audience goes, 'Why are these people still filming? This doesn't make sense.' Or, 'I hate these characters.' We wanted something with a deep personal human relationship at the center. Once we figured that out, we remembered the old podcast idea and changed it from a journalist to the brother-sister. We fell backward into the themes."

Creating a faux documentary posed some unexpected challenges. "Writing a fake documentary is really hard,"

CONSIDERING SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ARE SEEN IN *MAN FINDS TAPE* (LIKE THE LITTLE PALM MOUTH SEEN BELOW LEFT), MAYBE THIS CHARACTER HAS THE RIGHT IDEA.

Hall says. "Even though the format lends itself to a very loose production, *Man Finds Tape* was a very heavily scripted film. The methodology of it, the order of events and information being presented to the audience was very important. Normally when you're making a documentary, you have all of the footage first, and then you write the story that is going to present it. We had to do it in the opposite way: to write what the found footage version of the movie was. And then if you had all of that footage, how would you make a documentary about it? And then write all those transitions, the voiceover, etc. We had to conceive ahead of time."

"We chose this format because we didn't need a whole ton of expensive lights," Gandersman adds. "We could shoot out all our character interviews in a day and a half. So that lighter lift was planned from inception just to give us as much flexibility as possible."

The fledgling directors lucked into a dream team of producers to help shepherd their feature to the screen: the Rustic Films trio of David Lawson Jr. and writer-directors Aaron Moorhead and Justin Benson, the visionaries behind *The Endless*, *Resolution* and *Spring*; and Jess and C. Robert (*The Black Phone*) Cargill. The Cargills are long-time Austin friends of Hall and Gandersman, and they also loosely knew the Rustic outfit through the film fest circuit.

"These guys were career inspirations for us," Hall says. "When we saw their most recent film, *Something in the Dirt*, and its use of mixed media and a faux documentary approach, and it was made with a very small crew, I reached out to [Lawson] just to say, 'Hey, Paul and I are making this thing that has a lot of the same production elements. Could we pick your brain about the red flags and the things that you ran into?'" Lawson loved the project and signed on to produce, and a few months later, Moorhead and Benson joined, as well.

"Rustic's motto is: 'Make movies with friends.' And that's true on every level," Gandersman adds. "It's just strange how it all came together. The Rustic guys and the Cargills were all such incredible mentors. Working with them was an absolute dream come true. As producers, you'd expect the Rustic guys to be worrying about the audience, the box office, all that. They're like, 'Make the movie weirder, explain less, take stuff out, take out this explanation. Let the audience fill it in.' They gave us confidence to just strip out some of the answers to make the audience engage with it more. Which makes it more fun."

Man Finds Tape fits comfortably in Rustic's bizarre universe, as well as that of H.P. Lovecraft. "One of the things that I like about Lovecraft is when characters fall down a rabbit hole of discovery and insanity," Hall says. "And they keep chasing, wanting to get to the truth of this thing that's nagging away at their brain. I love the way he writes stories where people are on the brink of falling into full insanity. People are really responding to the Lovecraftian side of *Man Finds Tape* for that reason. Tonally, it's got that Lovecraft vibe."

The duo already has their immediate future mapped out. "We definitely want to do more genre movies," Gandersman says. "We're putting together a couple things right now. One with a friend of ours to direct, and then another one for us to direct. And then we've got our book, *The Dead Friends Society*, which we'd love to make into a movie one day." 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY MAGNOLIA PICTURES (FACING & TOP) BY DAVID COONE (BOTTOM) BY PAUL GANDERSMAN

AN UNLIKELY MONSTER

BY KOLLEEN CARNEY HOEPFNER

GENIAL AUSTINITE JOHN GHOLSON BECOMES *MAN FINDS TAPE*'S MALEVOLENT SECRET WEAPON.

Peter S. Hall and Paul Gandersman's *Man Finds Tape* opens with the low-resolution flicker of a southern televangelist's taped sermon. "I want you to place your hand there on the TV screen," Reverend Endicott Carr intones. He extends his arm, palm up, as if offering a blessing. "We're going to say a prayer today." The request is almost familiar, though disquieting, and deeply pervasive, moving several attendees at LA's Beyond Fest premiere to raise their own palms in kind.

The religious-leader-with-a-dark-secret trope isn't a new one, though Hall and Gandersman find a refreshing, Lovecraftian way to showcase Reverend Carr. That refreshing approach is through John Gholson, an actor whom Rustic Films' producer David Lawson called "Austin's best-kept secret" at that same LA screening. Though Gholson has been acting since 1998, his hard work is finally paying off with roles in two films that made their way through the 2025 festival circuits: *Man Finds Tape*, as well as Todd Rohal's gross-out comedy *Fuck My Son!*, based on the comic by Johnny Ryan.

Gholson's journey to the pulpit was a relatively blessed one: Hall offered him a smaller role, asking him if he knew anyone who could play Carr, who on the page was tall, thin, and elderly. Gholson sent Hall some videos of Southern televangelists such as John Hagee, known in the '90s for his staunch anti-Pokemon stance. "I don't think I've ever seen Hagee say anything uplifting," Gholson says. "He looks more like me, not *Phantasm*'s Tall Man." At the audition, Gholson read three different scenes for Carr. "When I was preaching, I could feel Peter, Paul, and Ashley [Landavazo, producer] lean in. It felt like church. When I left, I didn't necessarily think that I got the part, but that [was] the best audition I've ever had."

That charismatic opening sequence wasn't the only one imbued with evangelical energy. The first scenes shot were sermons, complete with a congregation. "I'm delivering the dialogue, preaching, and the audience was responding in kind with amens and hallelujahs. They were literally just vibing. It sort of replicated the experience I had with the audition." Gholson's palm-out prayer was "liberally borrowed" from televangelist Robert Tilton; he came up with it on the spot. He believes his background in improv (2022's *Make Popular Movies*

PHOTO BY PAUL GANDERSMAN

was entirely improvised) helped the directors feel at ease with his ad-libbing. "Because of the realism of found footage, you have to allow for some riffing. You're going to achieve some level of verisimilitude if it doesn't sound canned."

It worked. "It's the [scene] that opens the film, you see [it] in the trailer… It's a happy accident. I really appreciated the trust they had in me to voice the character in that way."

Gholson's first role was as a child, appearing in a college production of *Oedipus*. In 1998 he moved to Austin, following friends at UT who wanted him in their shorts. With auditions not panning out, he began to work full-time and stopped pursuing acting with "any degree of hustle." In 2005 Gholson enrolled in the Savannah College for Art and Design, landing roles in 18 student films. From there, he connected with actor Sam Eidson and appeared in 2013's *Zero Charisma*, which afforded him new opportunities due to the film's semi-cult status. "I ended up with a role in *Hidden America with Jonah Ray*. There was a lot of trickle-down from that."

2024 was the turning point for Gholson's career. "Within a week or two of [*Man Finds Tape*] wrapping I got the email from Rohal, saying 'I'm making this crazy comic-book movie with Robert Longstreet and Steve Little, and I have a part especially for you."

PHOTO BY DAVID COONE

THE *MAN FINDS TAPE* CREW, LED BY FILMMAKERS PETER S. HALL (SITTING) AND PAUL GANDERSMAN (SECOND FROM LEFT) CAPTURE GHOLSON'S UNNERVING PERFORMANCE.

This was his sign to buckle down with his career. "If I'm getting the chance to do things and I'm not chasing them, how would it be different if I *was* chasing them?" He secured an agent and was let go of his job of thirteen years, affording him even more full-time focus on acting; he was cast in Netflix's *Bad Thoughts* just a few weeks later.

After an exciting and overwhelming festival run, things are in flux for Gholson as he prepares for *Noise Complaint*, a play that will air live on Austin public television, while waiting for news from other auditions. "I can't sit still for long."

Still, he admits that perhaps he's earned a little rest. "I'm going to try to take it easy through the end of the year. *Fuck My Son!* will play theatrically as long as Todd wants it to."

Man Finds Tape hits VOD on December 5th. "It's been really cool to see the reviews are good. I imagine after December 5th it will feel like a long sigh. I need to take a breath and enjoy the ride." 💀

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

BY SEAN ABLEY

DAVID KITTREDGE'S DOCUMENTARY REVEALS THE BEATING HEART IN A D.O.A. SEQUEL TO THE EXORCIST.

In the snake-eating-its-tail genre of films about films, narratives often fall into one of two categories: "what went wrong with this disaster" or "watch how hard they work to create a masterpiece." What is less common are documentaries like David Kittredge's *Boorman and the Devil*, which examines the making of a notorious bomb – *Exorcist II: The Heretic* – with a compassionate, completist eye. Through his granular storytelling, Kittredge reveals the masterpiece within a disaster's DNA and recontextualizes one of the most humiliating cinematic failures for all involved – director John Boorman, his dedicated crew, a wary cast – into a rallying cry for artistic integrity.

Kittredge's fixation on the notorious sequel began during the golden era of home video rentals. As a teenager, he spent his time excavating the local video store and dreaming about making his own films. "When I was 14, I was kind of like a movieholic," Kittredge explains. "I was just intoxicated with movies, and books about movies and moviemaking, and how to make movies." As he satisfied his voracious appetite for cinema, inevitably, *The*

DAVID KITTREDGE'S *BOORMAN AND THE DEVIL* TAKES VIEWERS BACK IN TIME TO ONE OF THE MOST INFAMOUS CINEMATIC MISFIRES OF THE '70S.

Exorcist came across his eyeballs. "It flabbergasted me," he recalls.

By the time the *Exorcist II: The Heretic* VHS possessed his VCR, young Kittredge was already a self-taught student of film. "I had never seen a John Boorman film, but I knew he was a director of note." When the budding cinéaste finally watched the film in question, a decades-long fascination was sparked. "I thought the film was interesting, but confusing, but fascinating, really fascinating..." Years later, after seeing the original theatrical cut (versus the European edit, which was the only version widely available on home video at the time), the film "...really took my interest, because [that cut is] very much its own coherent thing."

Throughout the years, the film has never been far from Kittredge's mind. "There are images in that film that just kind of lodged in my brain," he explains. "That famous ghost glass shot of Louise Fletcher and the demon with the heart and Linda Blair over her," he offers as an example. "That whole tableau feels like a painting."

While Kittredge was fascinated by the technical aspects of *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, he was also drawn to the film's intellectual examination of possession, leaning away from religion and toward science, while simultaneously exploring the next evolution of human spirituality. But as he grew older and wiser in the ways of Hollywood, Kittredge would also become fixated on the context for the film's very existence.

"The fact that a major studio granted its biggest budget to an A-list director to do a sequel to their biggest film, and they went completely in another direction..." Kittredge shakes his head in disbelief. "I don't think I know of any other swings that are that audacious in cinema history."

That all being said, "I never wanted to make a documentary," Kittredge confesses. Before beginning *Boorman and the Devil*, the filmmaker made a solid narrative debut with his first feature, *Pornography: A Thriller*, and his "Director's Cut" edit of the much-maligned *54* was widely praised. But the devil beckoned. "Jeffrey Schwarz (*I Am Divine*) said to me, 'If you don't do this documentary, it will not get made, and the story will not be told,'" Kittredge recollects.

DIRECTOR MEETS DIRECTOR: KITTREDGE (RIGHT) ON SET WITH THE LEGENDARY JOHN BOORMAN.

"And I was so annoyed, because I knew he was right." Schwarz offered to procure Boorman's contact info, which led to Kittredge traveling to Ireland to interview the willing and enthusiastic 85-year-old director.

"[Boorman] was talking about his art and his life, and he was doing it in a very open and vulnerable way," remembers Kittredge. In fact, Boorman's recollections were so profound, Kittredge felt he had no choice but to push forward with the documentary because "...this is one of the greatest directors that has ever lived. He just gave me this interview, which is a gift, [and] I feel anybody who loves cinema needs to see it."

Producer Travis Stevens (*Jakob's Wife*) recalls he was drawn to the project by Kittredge's vision, which went beyond a "bad" film deep dive. "From our first conversation, David was clear in what he wanted the doc to be: a love letter to Boorman, and to the era of Hollywood where studio filmmakers were allowed to take risks," he offers, then adds, "...and what we culturally lost when that era ended."

After Boorman, the next name at the top of the interview wish list was the star of both *The Exorcist* and *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, Linda Blair.

"THIS IS ONE OF THE GREATEST DIRECTORS THAT HAS EVER LIVED. THIS INTERVIEW IS A GIFT, [AND] I FEEL ANYBODY WHO LOVES CINEMA NEEDS TO SEE IT."

- DAVID KITTREDGE -

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID KITTREDGE& TRIPLE FIRE PRODUCTIONS

LOUISE FLETCHER'S INTERVIEW IN KITTREDGE'S DOCUMENTARY IS HER FINAL ONSCREEN APPEARANCE (THE ACTRESS PASSED AWAY IN 2022).

Would this horror film royalty be game for an archeological dig into a role that would ultimately hang heavy on her reputation? "She was incredibly forthcoming, really funny, really sweet," recollects Kittredge. Blair, who good-naturedly spoofed her iconic role of Regan MacNeil in parodies *Repossessed* and *The Blair Bitch Project*, officially returned to *Exorcist* canon in 2023's *The Exorcist: Believer*. During her interview, she remained good-natured about her difficult time on Boorman's set. "This is a movie that put a huge dent in her career," Kittredge reminds us. "She was blamed for her performance, which was exactly the performance she was directed to give, and exactly the performance that Boorman wanted," he explains.

A surprising maternal influence throughout *Boorman and the Devil* is the late Louise Fletcher. In one of her last interviews before her death, Fletcher recalls with fondness and humor her experience playing Dr. Tuskin, Regan's psychologist. Even when lightly chastising her colleague's past behavior (to hear the actor tell it, Blair was a typical teenage girl), Fletcher fills Kittredge's film with a warmth one might not expect, given the subject matter. "All I can say about Louise Fletcher is that she was a dream," Kittredge recalls, his affection for the actress palpable. "My genuine love for her, and her contribution to this film, I can't even express…" When asked during her interview if she regretted her experience on the film, Fletcher's answer is particularly poignant. "We don't hear artists at the end of their life talking like this a lot… and I find it profoundly moving." He gets a bit misty as he remembers the moment. "I could not watch that without crying for a really long time."

In fact, throughout our conversation, Kittredge becomes quite emotional as he recounts the experience of making his film. "If I didn't feel strong emotions [about the subject], I wouldn't have been able to survive seven years of making a movie," he explains. "Especially about an artist and his greatest perceived failure. That's not a movie I've ever seen before. That's what was pushing me."

Stevens remains philosophical about that slow-and-steady schedule. "[Kittredge] is running calculations at a speed that would smoke most computers," the producer marvels. Thankfully, the extended production schedule allowed everyone time to breathe and reflect. "One thing I was happy to see evolve throughout the making of this doc was [Kittredge's] willingness to slow down. To allow time for ideas to blossom, to explore different approaches."

As a filmmaker, Kittredge is known to have an encyclopedic knowledge of the technical side of filmmaking. The appearance of so many of *Exorcist II*'s crew members in the documentary, down to the script supervisor and the

(THIS PAGE AND FACING) KITTREDGE TAKES VIEWERS BACK TO *EXORCIST II*'S PRODUCTION VIA INNOVATIVE AND STYLISH ANIMATED SEQUENCES.

locust wrangler, may surprise some audience members, but is definitely on-brand for the director. "I find the technical aspects of that movie to be really, really fascinating," Kittredge explains. "And I find it's like [the crew] were intoxicated with the possibilities of cinema. And I resonate with that."

As Kittredge fell in love with *Exorcist II: The Heretic*'s creative and technical teams, he was also faced with that age-old enemy of any filmmaker with a complicated story to tell – the dreaded runtime. Kittredge winces when the subject is brought up. "Oh, easily the most difficult part was getting the original, first rough cut down to the cut that it is now. I'm still somewhat traumatized by it."

"David is so knowledgeable, and so thorough an interviewer, that we had more movie than we knew what to do with," offers Stevens. The production team repeatedly screened different edits of the film to multiple audiences composed of different combinations of friends and colleagues. "I felt such a responsibility, not just to John and not just to the people who made the film," he explains, clearly still affected by years' worth of "Cut what you love." "I wanted this film to be a film that filmmakers watch when they're feeling dispirited."

Although the film did take seven years to make, Kittredge has obviously been in pre-production on *Boorman and the Devil* since he was a teenager. Along the way, his fascination with a well-intentioned misfire has transformed into a call to action for artists. "This documentary was never really about *Exorcist II: The Heretic*," offers Kittredge. "I love *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, but it was always about the audacity of making ambitious films, and how much you have working against you, and how you have to court failure if you're going to do it right. You have to go right up to that line, and sometimes over it, and make that thing that could just be laughed out of the room, or it could be a work of genius. I think that if you're an artist, you have to make your *Exorcist II: The Heretic*."

As an artist who grew up obsessed with Universal Monsters and punk rock, I always felt like those worlds were meant to collide. So when Universal and CultureFly asked me to design a line of 9-inch collectible figures, it just made perfect sense to turn these iconic monsters into a punk band. These characters already look like they belong onstage, so putting instruments in their hands just felt right. On the opposite page are my original turnaround sketches, which kicked off the whole process before the designs moved into sculpting, revisions, and production with the toy makers. After nearly three years of work, seeing these characters develop from sketches into finished figures has been surreal in the most rewarding way. This project let me merge the monster films I loved as a kid with the punk influences that defined my early years, and allowed me to craft something that feels like the truest reflection of who I am as an artist.

BRIDE

I wanted to make The Bride a mix of her classic design with some Siouxsie Sioux meets psychobilly influence, which is why I gave her post-punk makeup and a standup coffin bass. I kept her dress and hair true to Elsa Lanchester's original look, while adding green streaks and a battle vest covered in patches and pins to fit the band's punk style.

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

For Frankenstein's Monster, I took the classic Boris Karloff design and mixed in a bit of Lou Reed, imagining him built from the scraps of different punk rockers. It made total sense to make him the frontman on guitar, and since he's the most classic Universal Monster, I made him the most old-school looking punk in the group.

GILL-MAN

The first decision I made when designing the set of 4 was to make Gill-Man my official "Creature From the Black Leather Lagoon". I took heavy inspiration from The Cramps and Judas Priest, while giving him a punk leather cap that actually comes off to reveal a fin mohawk underneath. I felt that the Creature's chaotic energy made him the natural choice for the drummer.

DRACULA

Dracula is already goth by default, so I leaned into his classic look and pulled influence from Dave Vanian from The Damned. I gave his cape a psychedelic pattern as a visual nod to Screamin' Jay Hawkins and the wild prints you see across goth and glam style. I originally planned to give him a synth, but the keytar looked way better as we moved into the sculpt phase.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATTHEW LINEHAM // CULTUREFLY

PAYING RESPECTS AT THE BONE TEMPLE

BY AMBER T

DIRECTOR NIA DACOSTA ON HONORING – AND MOVING BEYOND – THE LORE OF DANNY BOYLE'S *28 DAYS/WEEKS/YEARS LATER* FRANCHISE.

FRIENDS TILL THE END: SAMSON (CHI LEWIS-PARRY) AND DR. KELSON (RALPH FIENNES) HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING.

"I didn't want to make a Danny Boyle movie," Nia DaCosta firmly informs FANGORIA, fresh off the press for her sapphic Ibsen reimagining *Hedda* and straight into conversations surrounding one of the most anticipated horror movies of 2026. "I wanted to make a *me* movie." Suffice to say, with *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*, which brings stars Ralph Fiennes, Alfie Williams, Erin Kellyman and Jack O'Connell back for another chapter of post-apocalyptic carnage in the sequel to Boyle's *28 Years Later*, DaCosta has not only made *her* movie, she's defied any reservations one might have about what the fourth installment in a horror franchise would, could, or should look like. Just as *28 Days Later*, all the way back in 2002, changed everything we thought we knew about zombies (yes, yes, technically they're *infected*), *The Bone Temple* upends our expectations of survivors, and what humanity looks like in the face of madness, cruelty, blood and bone – if it even still exists at all.

PHOTOS BY MIYA MIZUNO COURTESY SONY PICTURES

JIMMY CRYSTAL (JACK O'CONNELL) ASSEMBLES (AND PEROXIDES, ONE ASSUMES) HIS CREW.

For DaCosta, whose now five feature films have included everything from indie crime drama to Marvel blockbuster, it's a somewhat unexpected pivot to take the reins from Boyle for the second film in the planned trilogy. True, *The Bone Temple* is her second horror feature, following 2021's *Candyman*. But when Boyle's *28 Years Later* reintroduced us to a Britain ravaged by the Rage-Infected, devotees and detractors alike were left with one question: how does an American filmmaker confidently enter the world of *28 Years Later*, a world that's part *The Wicker Man* and part *The Good Life*, a thinly-veiled but no less effective analogy for Brexit and reckoning with a colonial past? Consider O'Connell's cult of Jimmies, modeled off prolific pedophile Jimmy Savile in all their gold-chained, tracksuited finery, backflipping off the craggy cliffs of Cheddar Gorge and into the horror

LOOKS LIKE SAMSON'S SIGNATURE SPINE-RIP IS ALIVE AND WELL IN THE SEQUEL.

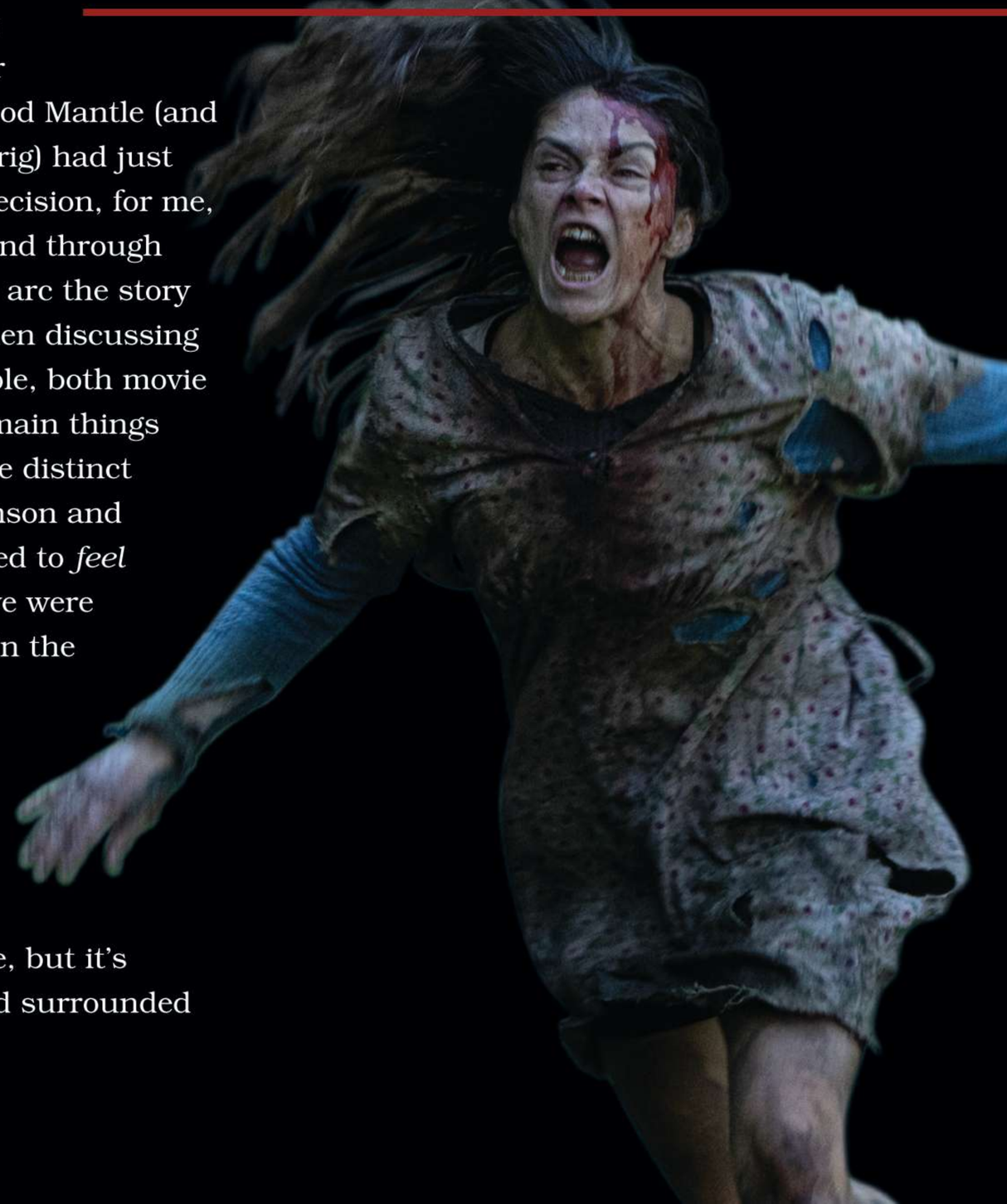
LEWIS-PARRY REACTS TO THE NEWS HE'S WEARING CLOTHES IN THIS ONE. A CO-STAR (BELOW) SHARES HIS — AND OUR — ANGUISH.

community's collective nightmares. In short, how does DaCosta accurately navigate a world that is at once so beautifully, so horrifically *British*?

In lesser Stateside hands, it could well be a hugely daunting, potentially catastrophic, venture – but DaCosta is certainly no stranger to these fair shores. Growing up with a father born and raised in the UK and a wider Jamaican family, she recalls, meant vacations to either the States or England, not to mention her extended stints living, studying and shooting in the UK, starting with 2019's *Top Boy* and most recently with *Hedda*. "I call [myself] peripherally British in a way," she muses. DaCosta is also quick to point out that the cultish, ravaged, post-apocalyptic insanity of *The Bone Temple* is not an accurate representation of the UK (not yet, at least, although with each passing election we seem to be edging ever closer): "Every world was completely different, and every world was not the world I was familiar with, necessarily, from my experience and my family in the UK. So it's always been fun to follow my instincts and what I know, as well as learning and researching."

Just as expecting a *28 Days Later* clone from *28 Years Later* was redundant, don't expect a *28 Years Later* copy from *The Bone Temple*. It's tough to ape Boyle's hyper-kinetic, instantly recognizable visual style, but, thankfully, DaCosta was never interested in doing so. *The Bone Temple* reunites DaCosta with acclaimed cinematographer Sean Bobbitt, a frequent collaborator who's been with her since *The Marvels*, with the pair deciding from the get-go to follow their own instincts, rather than look to what Boyle and Director of Photography Anthony Dod Mantle (and the now-infamous iPhone rig) had just finished: "Every creative decision, for me, filters through character and through story, and how we want to arc the story out," DaCosta explains when discussing the look of The Bone Temple, both movie and location. "One of the main things for me was wanting to have distinct worlds for Kelson and Samson and the Jimmies. I really wanted to *feel* The Bone Temple. When we were around The Bone Temple in the first film, it's initially this scary, weird place. But then you realize, 'Oh, this is actually really meaningful.' It's a place where someone has created a life, a solitary life, but it's peaceful, it's beautiful, and surrounded by stunning nature."

"SOMETHING THAT I LOVED ABOUT THE SCRIPT WAS HOW IT REALLY SHOWED THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE NO LONGER THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE IS FLOURISHING, AND YOU CAN SEE THE INFECTED AS A *PART* OF THAT FLORA AND FAUNA." -Nia DaCosta



The pastoral rumination on life, death and everything in between that runs through the *28* series further helped DaCosta bring her vision to life in a visual capacity. The bloodshed is mighty, but so is the beauty. "Something that I loved about the script was how it really showed that human beings are no longer the top of the food chain, but everything else is flourishing, and you can see the infected as a *part* of that flora and fauna. And then there's the world of the Jimmies, which is chaos, which is brutality, which is blood and guts and gore and some humor. So that camera movement and the lenses we used would be different, and the way we lit it would be different because it is just really important to me that, again, everything is filtered through character and story."

For DaCosta, one character in particular represents *The Bone Temple*'s specific sense of liminal mortality: Fiennes' iodine-soaked Dr. Kelson, the eccentric pariah whom DaCosta calls the "beating heart" of her movie. Kelson's relationship with a hulking Alpha Infected he affectionately refers to as Samson (played with gleefully terrifying abandon by 6'8" MMA fighter Chi Lewis-Parry) was hinted at in *28 Years Later*, and fully fleshed out in *The Bone Temple*, a journey for which DaCosta was "really excited to be the one to bring that to life."

In a cinematic landscape where horror prequels, sequels and requels usually equate to big box office bucks, it can be hard not to feel jaded when studios greenlight rehash after rehash of the same stories just to keep audiences nicely hopped up on IP. But one only has to remind themselves of DaCosta's previous foray into the genre to understand why she's the perfect person to tackle *The Bone Temple*. With *Candyman*, a direct sequel to Bernard Rose's supernatural horror classic, DaCosta proved herself as a director adept at honoring source material while also shaping it with her own ingenuity to create something at once unique and familiar. When asked if there were any lessons she took from *Candyman* to *The Bone Temple*, DaCosta is quick to point out how very varied beasts they are, while also acknowledging that on both films she was learning and working alongside two incredibly different powerhouse filmmakers on script duties, Jordan Peele and Alex Garland respectively:

"With *Candyman*, there was a lot of figuring it out as we went, and trying to see how we were going to push it. There was a lot of negotiation and collaboration in a really cool way in the script space. Whereas Alex and I are quite similar in this way; everything's on the page, everything is super clear and fully-baked before anyone sees it, and then you can build from there. What I learned from my first four films before doing this was just what process worked best, and how I could work best as a filmmaker – and how to really own *my* authority as a director. That was the biggest thing I learned."

As for avoiding the pitfalls that other legacy sequels so often fall into, DaCosta notes that nobody ever really expected another sequel to *28 Days Later* (2007's *28 Weeks Later*, while far less maligned than some of its peers of the era, remains very much an outlier in the canon), much less a sequel to *that* sequel: "When you think of *28 Days Later*, you don't think of a franchise movie, and I think anything that would make it feel like a 'franchise' would be wrong," she says. "Anything that would make it feel like a cynical ploy would feel wrong. That's why it was so great to do it with Danny and

DR. KELSON ADOPTS A FEARSOME NEW LOOK IN *THE BONE TEMPLE*.

WE'RE AS IN THE DARK AS Y'ALL BUT WE THINK THIS SCENE TAKES PLACE BEFORE THE ONE ON PAGE 89.

Alex, because it's their baby, and they would never come back to this world if it weren't the right way and the way *they* wanted. And to have that, which I think is very rare, was really special."

It could be argued that the only similarity that *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple* shares with other modern iterations such as *Scream*, *Halloween*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and so on is the return of a beloved character from a previous movie. Despite the rather unflattering assumption that the so-called Emaciated Infected (and FANGORIA #28 cover star) – who, in the record-breaking first trailer for *28 Years Later*, rose from a field of rapeseed and into immediate horror infamy – was *28 Days Later* star Cillian Murphy, Jim the bicycle courier made no such appearance in the first film. It will be DaCosta who brings him back to the big screen. At the time of writing, Murphy's role in *The Bone Temple* has been kept tightly under wraps, and while other sequels like to tantalize viewers by getting those nostalgia neurons firing with character posters, trailer teases and other throwback marketing tactics, if DaCosta had it her way, we'd still be in the dark about the entire thing. "Absolutely nothing," she laughs when asked what she can tell us about Murphy's highly-anticipated return to the series that put him on the map as an actor back at the turn of the millennium. Boyle may have let the cat out of the bag about Jim's comeback, but DaCosta urges us to "go in blind and get surprised." And so, dear reader, we will respect her wishes – but trust us, you're going to want to see Jim's return on the biggest screen possible, preferably with an audience who is just as excited as you are.

It's been almost thirty years since *28 Days Later* was released and forever changed the horror genre, with Boyle's influence seen throughout the influx of zombie media that followed, in everything from Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* to Max Brooks' *World War Z* and its Brad Pitt-starring adaptation. DaCosta, who watched *28 Days Later* for the first time when she was twelve years old and quickly wore out her family's DVD copy, attributes the continued appeal of the world of *28* to not only its scares but also the enduring freshness of the film, decades on. "We're all still in love with the things that surprised us," she says. "I know everyone talks about how it was the first time we saw Infected work fast instead of slow, but it's more than that. It's Danny's brain, the world he created, what Alex wrote, and those amazing characters. No one's really redefined that specific genre since."

Speaking of genres, if *28 Years Later*, with its jagged Young Fathers soundtrack and raging antiestablishmentarianism, serves as a loving callback to Boyle and Garland's punk-as-fuck roots, from its very title alone, *The Bone Temple* is far more evocative of another type of music, Satanic symbolism and all (there's one particular needle-drop that headbangers are going to want to make sure they're warmed up for…). When asked if any of the bloodshed and brutality in *The Bone Temple* will surprise even hardcore horror fans, DaCosta smiles coyly, still sticking true to her guns that revealing too much would be a disservice to viewers. "It's pretty metal," she offers. And reader – she ain't lying. 💀

DIRECTOR NIA DACOSTA WRANGLES JIMMY CRYSTAL AND HIS GANG.

DREAD AND LOVING IT

BY YULISSA MORALES

***The Mortuary Assistant* is an enormously popular video game, which has gone viral in the horror gaming community thanks to YouTube creators posting reactions to the relentless jump scares. In the game, available on Steam, you play a poor soul who's completed your degree in mortuary sciences and have taken on an apprenticeship at River Fields Mortuary. Late one night, you are called in to work to handle some embalmings – but there is something different about these bodies, because there is something different about *you*.**

Well, big news: Dread has partnered with the psychos at Shudder to bring the movie adaptation of *The Mortuary Assistant* to you, and you won't have to wait long to see it!

I can't say more about *Mortuary Assistant* without talking about DreadXP; a sister company of Dread and Dread Central. They're a leading independent horror games publisher of award-winning releases including games such as *Sucker for Love: First Date*, *My Friendly Neighborhood*, and the *Dread X Collections*, an anthology series of mini-horror games. Their next big project? The video game adaptation of *Paranormal Activity*, a game I'm guaranteed to play with the lights on.

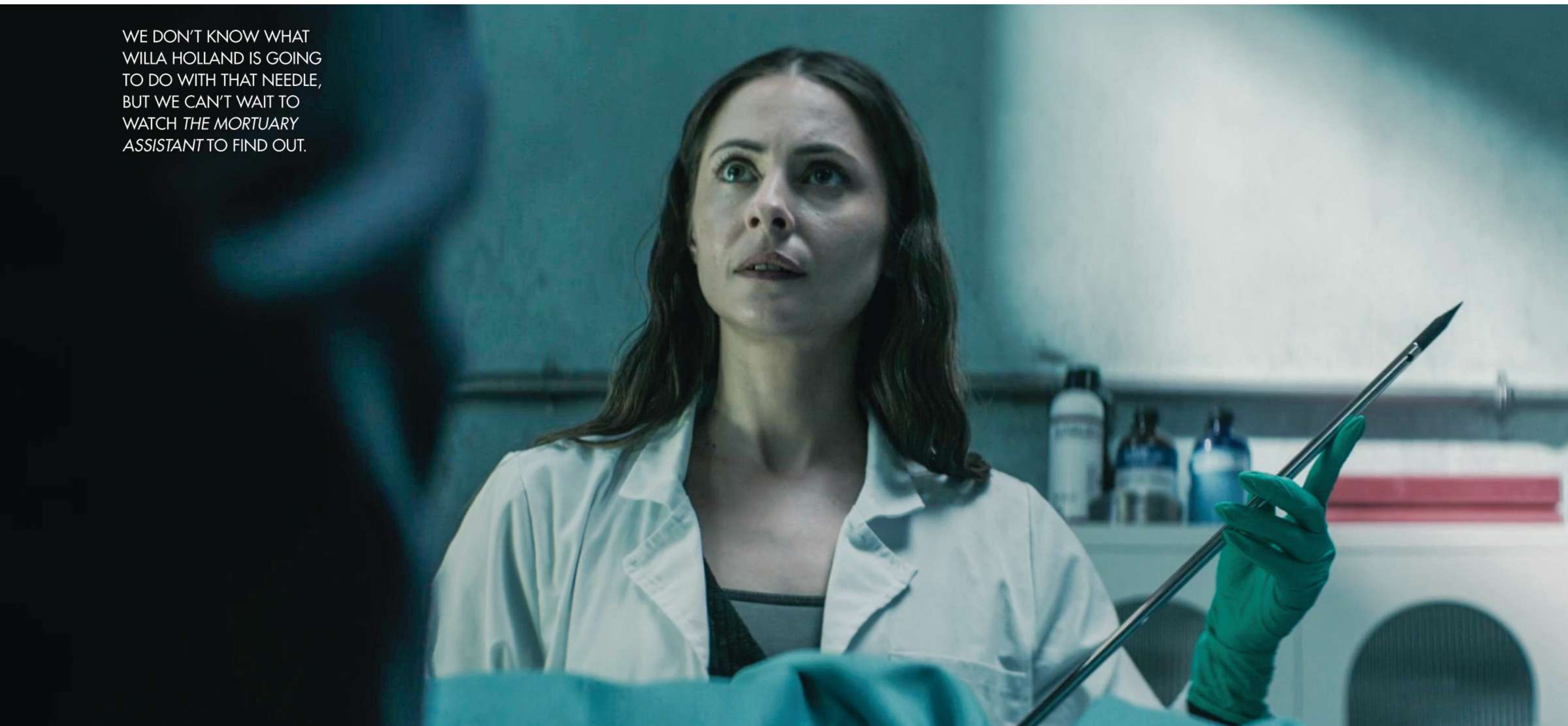
The DreadXP team have built quite a following, and that organically led to *The Mortuary Assistant*'s film adaptation. Brian Clarke created the game and helped write the script to ensure that it is as true to the game as possible. I was lucky enough to be onboard from the first draft of the script, as an Executive Producer on the film.

The very talented Jeremiah Kipp (*Slapface*) directed the film. Kipp is such an incredible director and has taken on a huge responsibility with bringing the game to life. This film couldn't have been put in better hands. The film has a great cast, including Willa Holland (*Arrow*, *Legion*) in the lead role of Rebecca Owens, a recent graduate looking for a fresh start who instead finds herself trapped in a nightmarish struggle with demonic forces and the dark secrets lurking inside the worst embalming room ever.

Joining her on screen is acclaimed actor Paul Sparks (*House of Cards*, *Boardwalk Empire*), who plays Raymond Delver, the mysterious mortician who trained Rebecca and has a deeper connection to the terrifying events taking place.

If you haven't played the game yet, consider this your warning / invitation to play it before the movie comes out. But if you're a chicken, then you can always enjoy clips of people utterly losing their minds playing it on socials. If you've got any other horror video game suggestions, give me a shout on socials @DreadPresents and @_yulissamora.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DREAD



WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WILLA HOLLAND IS GOING TO DO WITH THAT NEEDLE, BUT WE CAN'T WAIT TO WATCH *THE MORTUARY ASSISTANT* TO FIND OUT.

ANTHONY EVERITT'S

the VIDEO EYE of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

Three decades of Nazi horror to see or not-see (up to you).

THE FROZEN DEAD (1966)

I thought the idea of reviving the Third Reich would have been controversial, but what did I know? Dr. Norberg (Dana Andrews) must have been so annoyed once he realized what a humdrum premise he'd accidentally blundered into. In fact, the literal resurrection of frozen Nazi corpses was apparently so uninteresting for the filmmakers that they practically abandoned the idea within about half an hour or so, instead focusing their energy on an unbelievable romance between dull, vaguely unappealing people and a Frankensteinian body snatcher plot for the remainder. One particular reanimated gentleman remains on the fringes due to being the ingénue's father, and a convenient patsy for a murder at one point. Otherwise, I almost forgot World War II even happened! Some sporadic reappearances by a couple of Gestapo agents representing some shadowy underground network of subversives, far from grounding the plot, just adds more confusion. The shame of it is that the idea of a bunch of formerly brilliant individuals shuffling around like idiots and killing people would be a great metaphor for Germany's infamous "brain-drain." I guess the creative team realized too late just how many times the old "Nazi head on a life-support system" concept had already appeared on film, so they tried changing direction mid-stream.

I think the big takeaway here is that, believe it or not, this could have been a good movie. I mostly feel sorry for Dana Andrews, as he actually seems to have researched his accent.

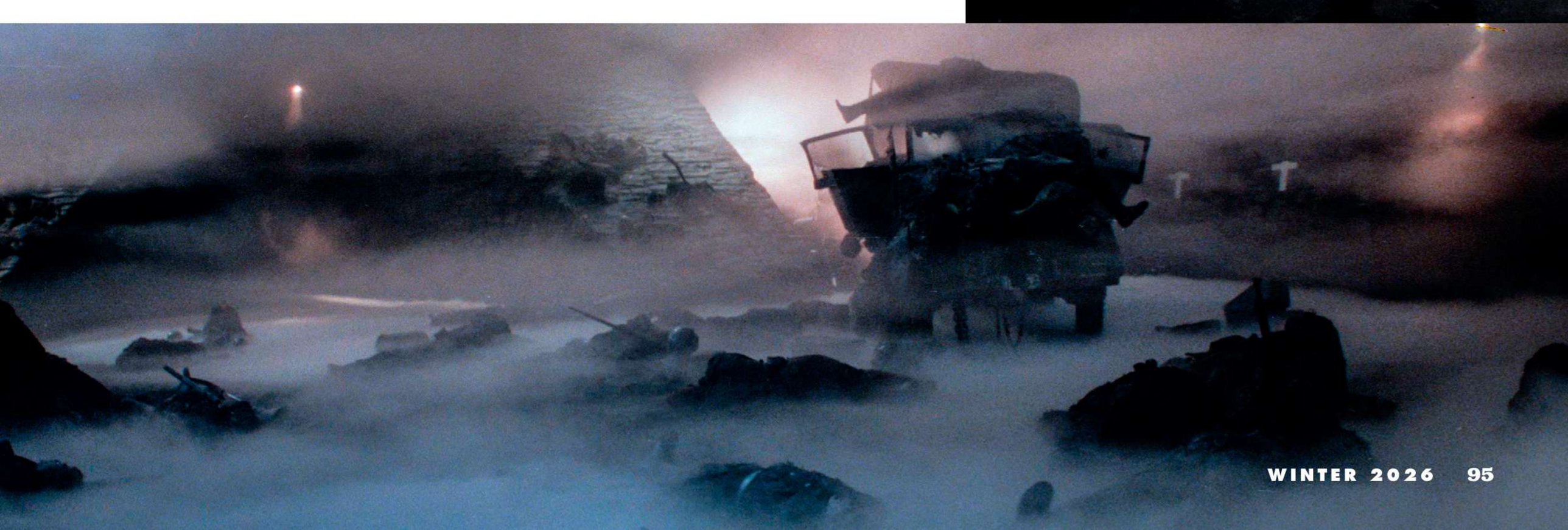
SHOCKWAVES (1977)

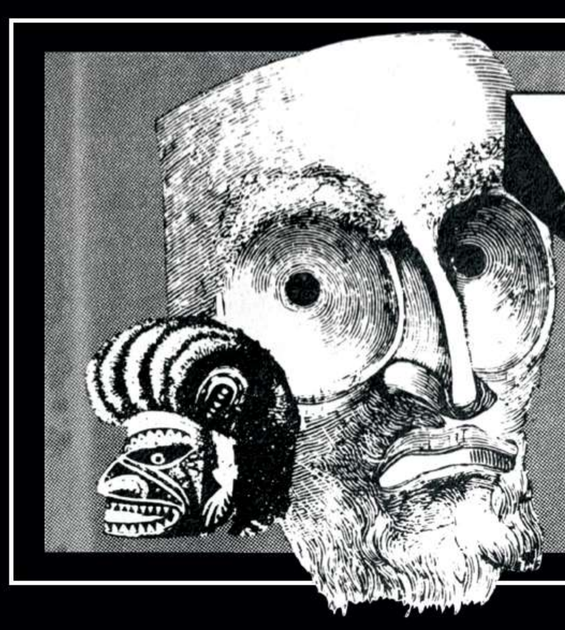
The '70s and early '80s were a golden age for Romero-esque zombie films, to be sure, and this is one reason why. The setup is deceptively mundane, the buildup is simple and effective, and the chaos of the final act is brutal and gritty, with twists that are believable and rooted in straightforward, bare-bones character development. Kinda funny how apocalyptic survival scenarios can flip the script: a Nazi scientist sometimes gets to break character and be thoughtful, even heroic, while high-school-quarterback Art Garfunkel's untreated claustrophobia can sneak up and make him into a monster during the climax. The economical, stripped-down writing is helped by tight editing, all a welcome change of pace for yours truly. But the real stars of the show are, of course, the Nazi zombies. The costumes and strategic use of underwater photography, plus actors who can apparently free-dive for extended periods of time without releasing air bubbles, all go a long way in creating an unusually menacing atmosphere. I'm especially partial to that signature Alan Ormsby makeup, too.

I've heard people go on about how fashionable the Nazis used to be, but they never mention how well-made those uniforms were, surviving decades underwater without losing a stitch or sacrificing style. And to think, this was made at a time when many of the original gang were still alive and hanging out in South America, cowering in fear for their lives. How refreshing it must have been to run into some young blood, albeit dead.

THE KEEP (1983)

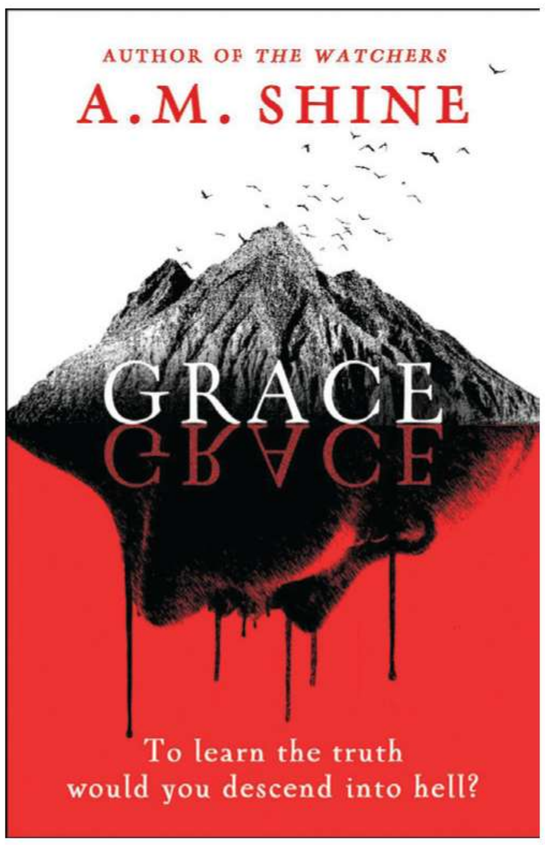
There seems to be this notion floating around that a Tangerine Dream soundtrack is enough to elevate the status of a movie, which, to me, is a nice way of saying that most of the movies in which their music is featured suck eggs. As is the case here, a pretentious, meandering script doesn't necessarily make a more insightful or interesting viewing experience, it just makes it boring and didactic. I suppose that's the banality of evil in a nutshell: if you want to make stupid people riled up then it's necessary to talk them into a pompous, masturbatory trance – and boy, is there a lot of talking! You could probably pick a random scene of hot Nazi-on-Nazi ethics discourse and fit Nietzsche's whole body of work into it – and still have room for a *Mein Kampf*. It starts off all right with bleak, convincing sets and promises good pacing with some wholesome supernatural Nazi disfigurement, but it immediately nosedives into a stupefying drone of rhetorical diarrhea and soapy dialogue. Also, since when have Nazis ever moved into a castle without any interest in or knowledge of its occult associations? After a while, though, you sort of forget all that and just resent the gym-rat skeleton man for taking so long to kill everyone already, not because they're Nazis but just so the hurting stops! That's when it sinks in: maybe, despite all the bluster, he doesn't really want to kill them after all. Maybe he needs those Nazis around as much as they need him because, ideological differences aside, their core interests converge someplace and all this is a distraction. 💀





NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



GRACE

DUE OUT:
2/10/2026

AUTHOR:
A.M. Shine

PUBLISHER:
Bloomsbury USA

Grace receives a phone call she never once expected. A priest beckons her back to a home she didn't know she left, a small island off the west coast of Ireland rumored to be cursed. What's most unsettling isn't the discovery of her biological mother or the dereliction of the community – it's the utter lack of children on the land. Not a single birth has happened in 30 years, and the slumbering evil responsible for it spares no time making itself known to her.

Grace follows in the tradition of Gothic tales like *The Woman in Black*. The forbidden land that outsiders are doomed to discover is a classic location used to great effect. But this world is made fuller as the personalities and fears of the hardened locals are explored along the way. To the delight of modern readers, it doesn't hint or evade as much as its predecessors. The evil presence here is in your face. Straight from Irish folklore and beyond vicious, the antagonist goes beyond misty ghosts. However, the book's graphic scares don't overshadow its dour themes. Man's greed and secrets are just as destructive as any foe. The language is lyrical and grounded, providing a clear view of events without slowing the pace of its shocking reveals. *Grace* is a terror tale that pulls off folk and Gothic horror seamlessly. Coastal and cold, it's an ideal fireside read for a more ghoulish audience.

BLOODFIRE, BABY

DUE OUT:
2/17/2026

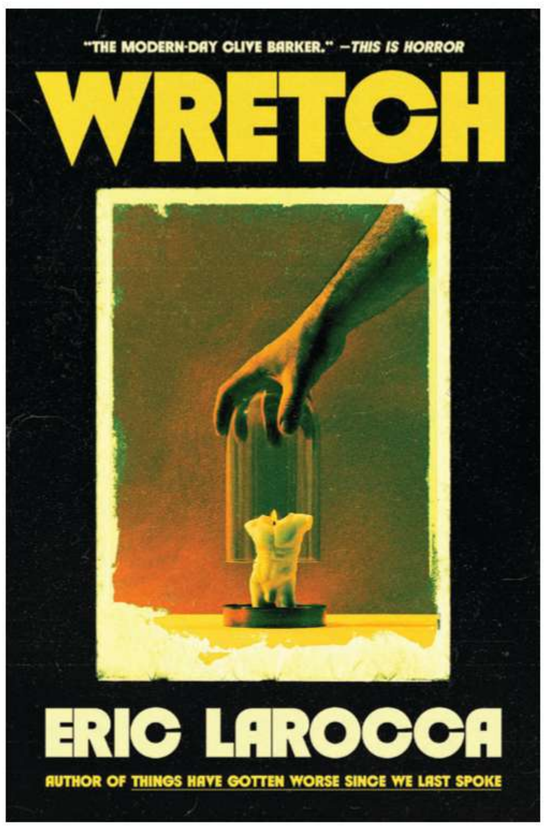
AUTHOR:
Eirinie Carson

PUBLISHER:
Dutton

Sofia's expectation of motherhood is smashed to bits soon after bringing her infant home. Still reeling from the drastic change, her new reality is made worse when her husband leaves for three weeks. Unending crying and sleep deprivation eat away at her. As the days tick by, Sofia adapts to a surreal, isolated existence. Time stops making sense. Shadow figures watch her from the corners of her home. Thoughts turn homicidal. Her condition isn't simply postpartum; it's a long family curse coming to claim another mother.

Bloodfire, Baby deceives with its outward normality. The first half acclimates readers to this fledgling mom by getting them up close to her raw, wounded psyche. Banal, everyday tasks seem harmless until the tone covertly shifts from frustration to contempt to searing rage. Her unraveling is slow and subtle, building tension with interjecting stories of injustice that echo from her Jamaican ancestry. The dam break is a wave of hallucinatory, psychological terror. It's debatable what is more disturbing: scuttling phantoms from the past or the violent fantasies that spill from her brain. A domestic Gothic at its heart, the story also tortures the protagonist with zealotry and systemic racism. *Bloodfire, Baby* is an addictive, albeit distressing read, especially to any expecting parents out there. Carson pens the searing loss of identity and disconnection from one's body with pure vulnerability in this daring rendition of maternity horror.

GOTHIC LITERATURE IS SICK OF MAKING ITS INTRODUCTIONS, SO TODAY WE'RE SIMPLY APPLAUDING ITS VERSATILITY. It can be found in 1879 or 2025. It can be sly and unassuming, or bold and delightfully apparent. Timeless and at home in every story of humanity, the Gothic is the literary tool specially designed to translate the uncanny. These fresh additions to the Nightmare Library are profound examples of those Gothic sensibilities that simply refuse to die.



WRETCH: OR, THE UNBECOMING OF PORCELAIN KHAW

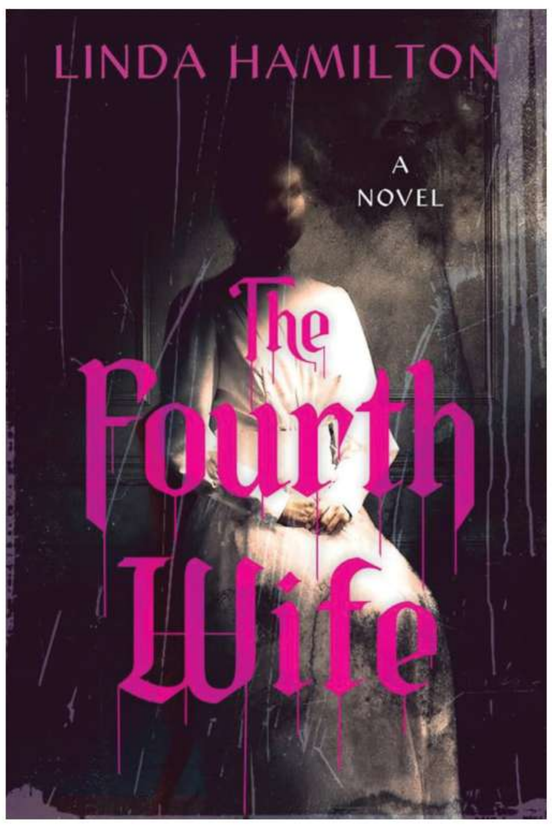
DUE OUT:
3/24/2026

AUTHOR:
Eric LaRocca

PUBLISHER:
Saga Press

Simeon Link is lost in the tide of grief. Ever since his beloved husband passed, life has been unbearable. It isn't until discovering a support group called the Wretches does an interest spark in him. They claim to see their loved ones in random objects captured on film, but Simeon needs more. He needs something tangible, something real. He needs to feel his husband. This flaming desire leads him to Porcelain Khaw, a man fabled to possess the gift Simeon craves above all else.

Wretch is right on par with LaRocca's signature bleak, multi-media style. Highly erotic and depressive, the story confronts the trials of grief through an intimate narrative. It's like reading the forbidden diary of a troubled stranger. Simeon gives voice to the desperate emptiness only death can instill, while commenting on the complexities of self-loathing and queer relationships. A blurriness exists between the villains and heroes in the book. They're more akin to victims and users caught in an unstoppable cycle. This ambiguity only lends itself to the fascinating and desolate atmosphere. LaRocca may have consumed extreme films like *Nekromantik* and *Singapore Sling* during the writing process, but the supernatural rules these tech-Gothic pages. This brand of spirit is unique and the consequences of contacting them are horrid. *Wretch* leaves a bone-deep impression of sorrow and discontent unlike any other. It cuts indiscriminately, which may be the exact kind of horror you've been begging for.



THE FOURTH WIFE

DUE OUT:
3/31/2026

AUTHOR:
Linda Hamilton

PUBLISHER:
Kensington Publishing

It's 1879 and Hazel Russon's only duty in life is to be an obedient Mormon woman. Yet, adhering to the church has been a lifelong struggle. Her wish to marry her childhood sweetheart is snatched away once she's forced to become the fourth wife of a mysterious man named Jacob. When she arrives at his decrypted manor, she's shocked to discover that all his wives and children live together. But their resentment is tolerable compared to the strangeness of the house. Hazel swears it speaks to her, pleading with her to uncover its dark secret.

The Fourth Wife entertains a difficult topic that's not often seen in the genre. Being raised in the Mormon community, Hamilton focuses her novel on the women whose stories and suffering were eradicated from history. Her female characters represent a range of opinions on polygamy and the doctrine overall. The tone is respectful but challenging. A trademark Gothic setting is a fantastic, unexpected backdrop to this kind of story. The haunted house allows nightmares, mystery, and floating specters to roam freely among the themes of abuse and manipulation. Despite the subject matter, the content isn't entirely demure. Readers will find the visuals to be startling, bloody, and erotic. *The Fourth Wife* is a devastating Gothic romance set to kill. Informative and atmospheric, it's a foreboding mystery that keeps you guessing. *Crimson Peak* and historical horror fans, gird your loins.

Contributors' Crypt

Follow our talented roster of contributors on social media! Be polite, you animals.

Sean Abley ..... @gay_of_the_dead
Sharai Bohannon ..... @misssharai
Meredith Borders ..... @mereborders
Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton
Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines
Amelia Emberwing .....@thatwitchmia
Isaac Feldberg ..... @ijfeldberg
Yulissa Morales ..... @_yulissamora
Richard Newby ..... @rnewb
Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire
Brandon Wainerdi .....@actuallybrandon

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

MONSTER GIRLS: The secret history of women in fx makeup. Instagram @monstergirlsdoc

JAWS 3D in theaters is a must see! I honestly think I came out a better person.

Dearest Lucy, I love you and our son Raff. Will you marry me? Raff and I have such sights to show you!

Rene - We never quit, we never give up. Just like life's horrors, we persist. Love Stone

You got through 2025 alive, Boo Boo! Onward and upward. Love you!

Stormy, by the time this issue is out you will have finished your thesis. Now get some rest! - K & Z

Curtis Gerhart, one year down and forever to haunt each other. Let's never let life bury our romance. Love, Sierra Waff

Fran, it was so great to meet you, and I hope you know how much your daughter loves you. Happy 2026!

2nd KORK International Horror Film Festival, October 25–26 in Istanbul, Turkey. 34 Films, 2 Days. Online and in-person tickets on sale now!

Happy 40th Anniversary Larry and Linda! May we all find a love as strong as Gomez and Morticia's as you both have. Cara mia, mon cher!

What if there was a Chainsaw Dinosaur?

Hey you spooky little freaks, check out brokenjawjewelry.com for all the spooky jewelry and accessories you need for the best time of the year

Happy birthday, Damien! I'm so lucky to be your mom!

Shoutout to Fango Book Club! Home of good company, kidney auctions, and all the insightfulness you can shake a severed hand at.

To All The Ghouls I've Loved Before. Peter x

Happy New Year, Fangorians! Thanks for sticking with us and making this all so much fun. - Angel

Thanks to all of you who made the Compendium campaign such a major success. We won't let you down.

Hey Leilani! Thanks for letting me show you BLACK CHRISTMAS/SILENT NIGHT DEADLY NIGHT on 35mm!<3

Support indie pop culture criticism at picketywitch.com!

Turn one: Play and tap one swamp, cast Dark Ritual, with three floating black mana use one to cast Sol Ring, tap Sol Ring for two colorless and cast Sheoldred, the Apocalypse from the Command Zone.

Shout out to my lovely wife who supports me in all the weird stuff I do at Fango and makes sure I drink water. - JK

Things to Come

Horror is in full flush this spring, as films like Radio Silence's READY OR NOT 2: HERE I COME, Lee Cronin's spin on THE MUMMY, festival hit OBSESSION, HOKUM (from ODDITY director Damian Mc Carthy) and Glenn McQuaid's THE RESTORATION AT GRAYSON MANOR bloodily bloom on these very pages. What else is coming? I can't say! (No, seriously, I have no idea yet.) We'll both find out in April!

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